

Alternatives Analysis

for

STPP 69-1(9)22

Boulder-South

(CN 2019)

in

Jefferson County, Montana



September 2006

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1.0 HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

A portion of Montana State Primary Route 69 (MT 69) south of Boulder, in Jefferson County, was nominated for reconstruction, and a preliminary field review was conducted by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in May 2004. MDT announced plans to reconstruct a portion of MT 69 in a press release in November 2004. The proposed action originally had two parts:

- Widen and improve the southern portion of the project corridor on MT 69 from Mile Post (MP) 22.186 to MP 30.8±.
- Redesign and reconstruct the portion of MT 69 from MP 30.8± to MP 37.1±.

Since that time, the project has been split. The southern portion from MP 22.186 to MP 30.8± will proceed as an independent overlay and widening project. The northern portion is the focus of this study.

Project Area Description

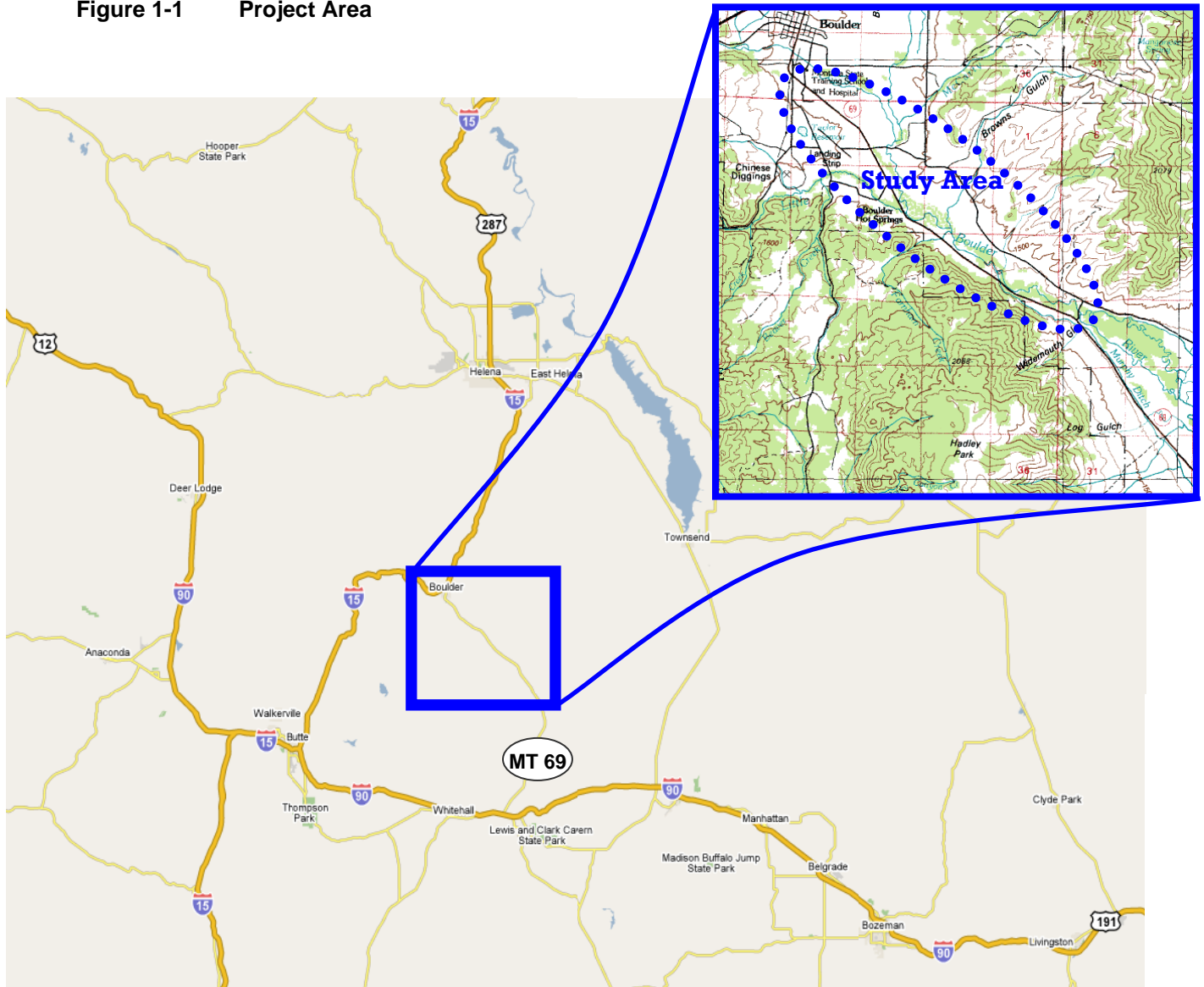
As shown in Figure 1-1, the proposed project is located within the following legal description(s):

<u>Township</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Section(s)</u>
5 N	3 W	18, 19
5 N	4 W	2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 24
6 N	4 W	32, 33

For the purposes of this Alternatives Analysis, the project area begins at MP 30.8± and extends to the north approximately six miles, ending at MP 37.1± just south of Boulder.

The existing MT 69 alignment is a state primary highway. It is used by rural residents traveling between home and work, as well as regional users traveling between Helena, Butte, Three Forks, and Bozeman. MT 69 is also an interstate truck route, and currently serves a substantial number of regional, national, and international freight carriers.

This portion of the Boulder Valley is also served by a county road that is used primarily by rural residents in Jefferson County. Residents along the county road report enjoying the rural character of the area and emphasize that they value the privacy and quiet associated with low traffic volumes along the road. The county road is also used extensively by agricultural vehicles and for moving livestock.

Figure 1-1 Project Area

MDT began the process of identifying a consultant to conduct an analysis of the proposed project and its potential impacts in December 2004. During contract negotiations with the consultant, MDT conducted a public scoping meeting held on June 1, 2005 in Boulder. The southern ($30.8\pm$ to MP $37.1\pm$) and northern (MP 22.186 to MP $30.8\pm$) portions of the proposed project, and two alignment alternatives for the northern portion were presented at the public meeting. One alignment option involved reconstruction of the existing MT 69 alignment, and one involved construction of a new alignment on the east side of the Boulder River following the existing county road as much as practicable. Approximately 100 people attended the meeting and the majority of those in attendance expressed their disapproval of any new alignment east of the river.

Many residents who own property on the east side noted that they would not be willing sellers of any needed right-of-way for a new alignment. State Representative Scott Mendenhall expressed

his concern that the state would have a difficult time justifying the acquisition of property on the east side of the river if it would be at all feasible to reconstruct the existing MT 69 alignment. Through later correspondence, the Jefferson County Commission and Planning Board separately expressed their concern over a new alignment and favored reconstruction along the existing MT 69 alignment.

Given the intense level of public opposition and the admonitions from state and local elected officials, MDT determined that it would be most beneficial to conduct a pre-NEPA screening of alternatives to compare the relative pros and cons of the two alternatives under consideration. This screening was intended to be brief and only detailed enough to determine whether additional analyses were warranted, or if an alternative could clearly be eliminated due to a magnitude of projected difference in impacts or construction costs.

The following Alternatives Analysis documents the history of the project; the rationale for the development of alternatives; physical opportunities and constraints in the corridor; screening criteria; qualitative, planning-level analysis of impacts; planning-level cost estimates; and public and agency concerns expressed to date.

This analysis is intended only as a guide. It does not provide a recommendation for a proposed project, nor does it supplant the need for further NEPA/MEPA analysis for an actual project proposal.

2.0 DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

The existing MT 69 alignment in this corridor is a narrow, two-lane facility with limited shoulders and steep side slopes. The alignment generally follows the Boulder River through this corridor with wetlands on either side of the road and a substantial rock outcropping adjacent to the western side of the road near MP 34±. A representative portion of the road is shown in Figure 2-1.

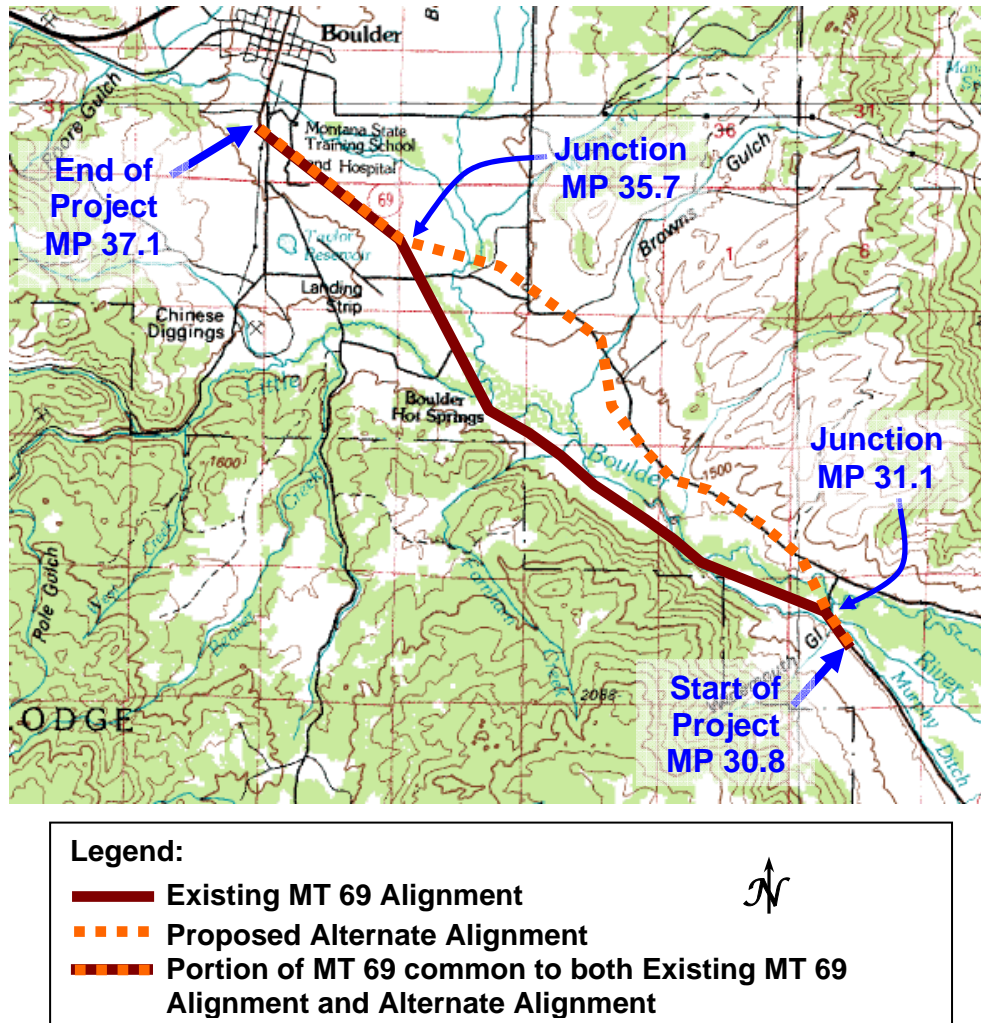
Figure 2-1
Existing Roadway Along Boulder River



MT 69 was nominated for reconstruction based on geometric deficiencies and safety concerns. Existing roadway geometrics along this portion of the route do not meet current standards and do not provide the desirable levels of safety and efficiency. The Preliminary Field Report prepared for the entire corridor noted horizontal and vertical geometric deficiencies. The overall accident severity rate for the portion of MT 69 between MP 22.186 to MP 37.1 is approximately 30 percent greater than the statewide average for state rural primary highway systems. The truck severity rate for the portion of MT 69 between MP 22.186 to MP 37.1 is approximately 70 percent greater than the statewide average for state rural primary highway systems. The accident trend for all vehicles over the past ten years has continued to be single vehicle off-road crashes resulting in overturn.

When MT 69 was nominated for reconstruction, MDT took into consideration the challenges associated with providing the necessary improvements along an alignment constricted by the Boulder River and the steep side slopes; marshy land and numerous wetlands which make construction more complex, costly, and difficult to permit; and rock outcrops which cause shading and icing problems in inclement winter weather. MDT initiated the development of a conceptual alignment that would generally follow the existing county road east of the river. It was presumed that this alignment would be easier to construct, result in fewer wetland and river impacts, and provide a better opportunity to improve safety along this route.

Figure 2-2
Proposed Alignments



Existing MT 69 Alignment

This alternative would widen the existing MT 69 alignment from MP 30.8 to MP 37.1, correct several horizontal and vertical curve deficiencies, while attempting to minimize impacts to the river, wetlands, and irrigation facilities. This alternative is 6.3 miles in length. There are 85 acres of existing right-of-way along this alignment.

Alternate Alignment

As shown in Figure 2-2, this alignment would follow the existing MT 69 alignment from MP 30.8 to MP 31.1. It would cross the river at MP 31.1 and climb up out of the river bottom, generally following an existing Jefferson county road alignment. It would rejoin the existing MT 69 alignment at MP 35.7, and follow the existing MT 69 alignment from MP 35.7 to the project termini at MP 37.1. The alternate alignment is 6.41 miles long. There are 19.5 acres of existing right-of-way along this alignment on the contiguous portion of the existing alignment. The alignment between MP 31.1 and MP 35.7 is on an existing county road easement.

3.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

For full compliance with NEPA/MEPA regulations and permitting requirements, all federally funded actions require some level of analysis to determine whether measures can be undertaken to avoid, minimize, or mitigate anticipated impacts to sensitive resources in a given project area. Oftentimes, this analysis is conducted through the development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Given the high level of public sensitivity, and expressed opposition to the alternate alignment by adjacent landowners and local public officials, a full on-the-ground resource inventory of the existing MT 69 and proposed alternate alignment routes was deemed inappropriate. To conduct a broad-brush analysis in the most effective and non-intrusive manner, the analysis in this report is based on available database searches. These searches included a review of the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) database, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil mapping, the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) database search and communication with MNHP biologists, U.S. Census Bureau database, and windshield surveys of the existing MT 69 and alternate alignment routes.

The analysis contained in this report is not intended to meet NEPA/MEPA requirements or provide a detailed accounting of all resources or potential impacts, but is merely intended to point out those resources or areas of social, economic, and environmental concern that would likely be a factor in future project decisions and permitting processes.

The Federal Highway Administration has provided guidance that outlines several areas of concern under NEPA. Each of the areas of concern are briefly discussed below relative to their pertinence in this corridor. All issue areas would require further study under a full environmental analysis for any specific proposed future projects.

Land Use

Land in the project area along the existing MT 69 alignment is primarily undeveloped, uncultivated wetland. Land along the alternate alignment is primarily in rangeland use, crossing wetlands near the junction points at MP 31.1 and MP 35.7.

The project area is largely under private ownership, although there are interspersed land areas owned by the state of Montana, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Farmlands

The corridor contains small areas of land classified as Prime Farmland if Irrigated and Farmland of Statewide Importance. A study of impacts to these land areas would be required under any NEPA/MEPA analysis.

Social Conditions

The project corridor is largely defined by rural ranching communities. There are a number of farms and ranches located along the alternate alignment. The county road is used extensively by agricultural vehicles and for moving livestock.

Economic Conditions

MT 69 is an interstate truck route, and currently serves a substantial number of regional, national, and international freight carriers. Regional and interstate commerce is dependent on this route for the transport of goods and services. The M.S. Molitor Trucking company is a major employer in the area and currently dispatches over 50 trucks and over 60 trailers from their Boulder office.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Pedestrian/bicycle traffic in the vicinity of the proposed project is currently limited, and the narrow paved width and lack of shoulders through much of the corridor does not encourage pedestrian/bicycle use on the existing MT 69 alignment. Although there are no formal bicycle/pedestrian facilities along the alternate alignment, low traffic volumes allow rural residents to walk and bicycle on the county road.

Air Quality

There are no air quality issues in the project corridor.

Noise

Due to the largely rural nature of the corridor, there are very few noise receptors in close proximity to either proposed alignment. A full analysis would need to be conducted to address local concerns and compliance with MDT and FWHM noise policies.

Water Quality

The Boulder River is TMDL impaired due to mining waste and agricultural run-off. Impacts to water quality resulting from implementation of either alignment would require further review under any NEPA/MEPA analysis. All roadway design and construction activities would need to be compliant with current stormwater pollution prevention control standards.

Wetlands

As shown in Figures 3-1 to 3-5, twenty-four (24) wetlands were delineated along the existing MT 69 alignment during site visits on July 6, 7, 12, and 13, 2005. Twenty-three of these are Category III wetlands, and one is a Category II wetland. Nineteen of the wetlands are considered jurisdictional under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) 404(b) permitting guidelines because they border on or are directly connected to a Water of the U.S. An additional two wetlands may be jurisdictional because of a strong subsurface connection with the Boulder River. These two wetlands (18 and 19) are extensive and are wet meadow communities with forested or scrub-shrub edges. Consultation with the COE may be necessary to determine the need for mitigating impacts to these wetlands.

The total delineated acreage along the existing MT 69 alignment is approximately 115 acres. The jurisdictional wetlands comprise 104 acres and the non-jurisdictional wetlands, including Wetlands 18 and 19, make up the additional 11 acres. Wetlands 18 and 19 cover approximately six acres; therefore, if they are determined to be jurisdictional, their acreage would bring the total to 110 acres of jurisdictional wetlands.

Based on a review of Jefferson County soil mapping, aerial photographs, and windshield survey data, it was determined that a number of wetland areas are also located near points where the alternate alignment leaves and rejoins the existing MT 69 alignment. The total acreage of wetlands along the alternate alignment has not been surveyed, but is estimated to be less than or equal to 30 acres.

Figure 3-2
Wetland Map 1

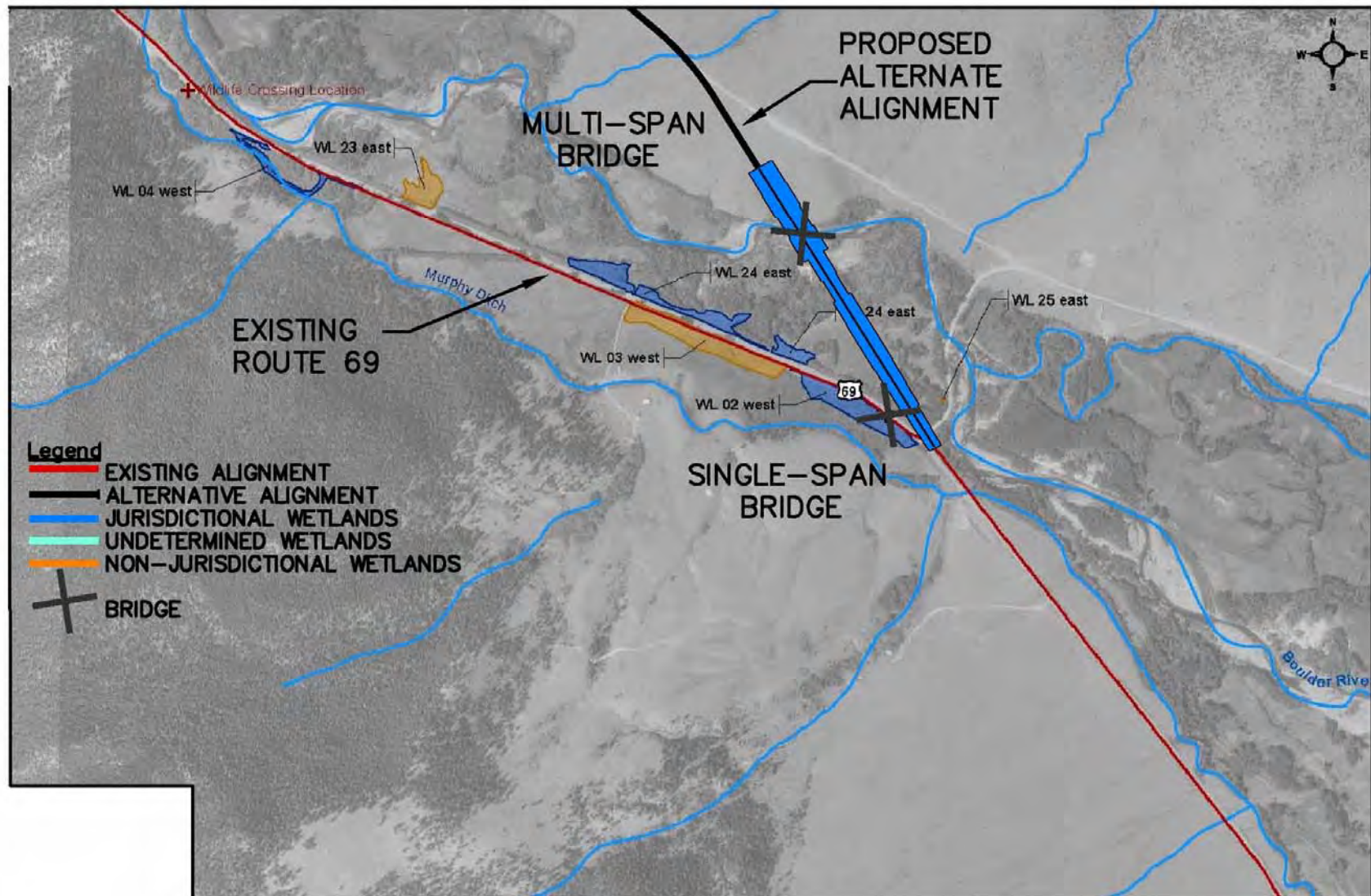


Figure 3-3
Wetland Map 2

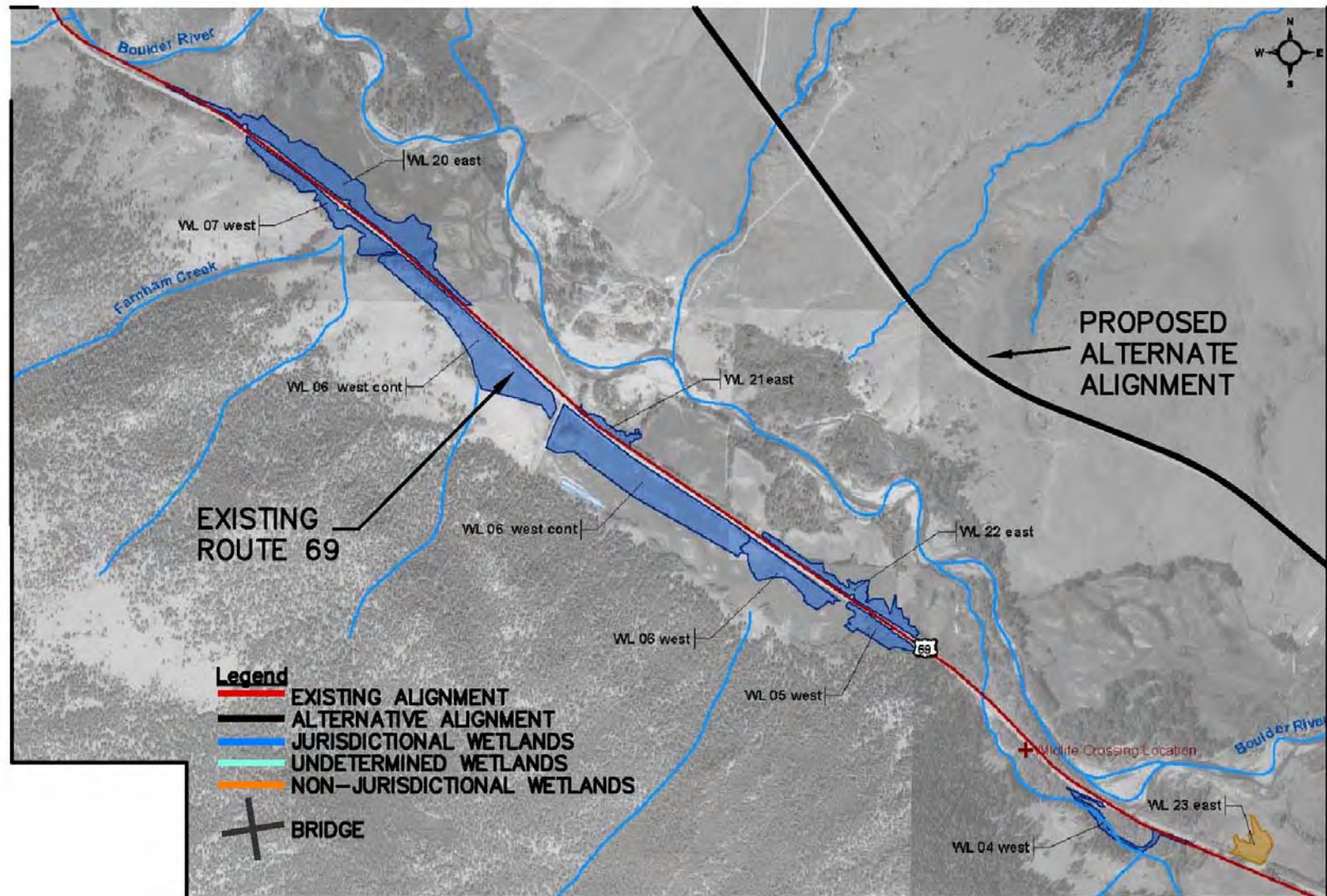


Figure 3-4
Wetland Map 3

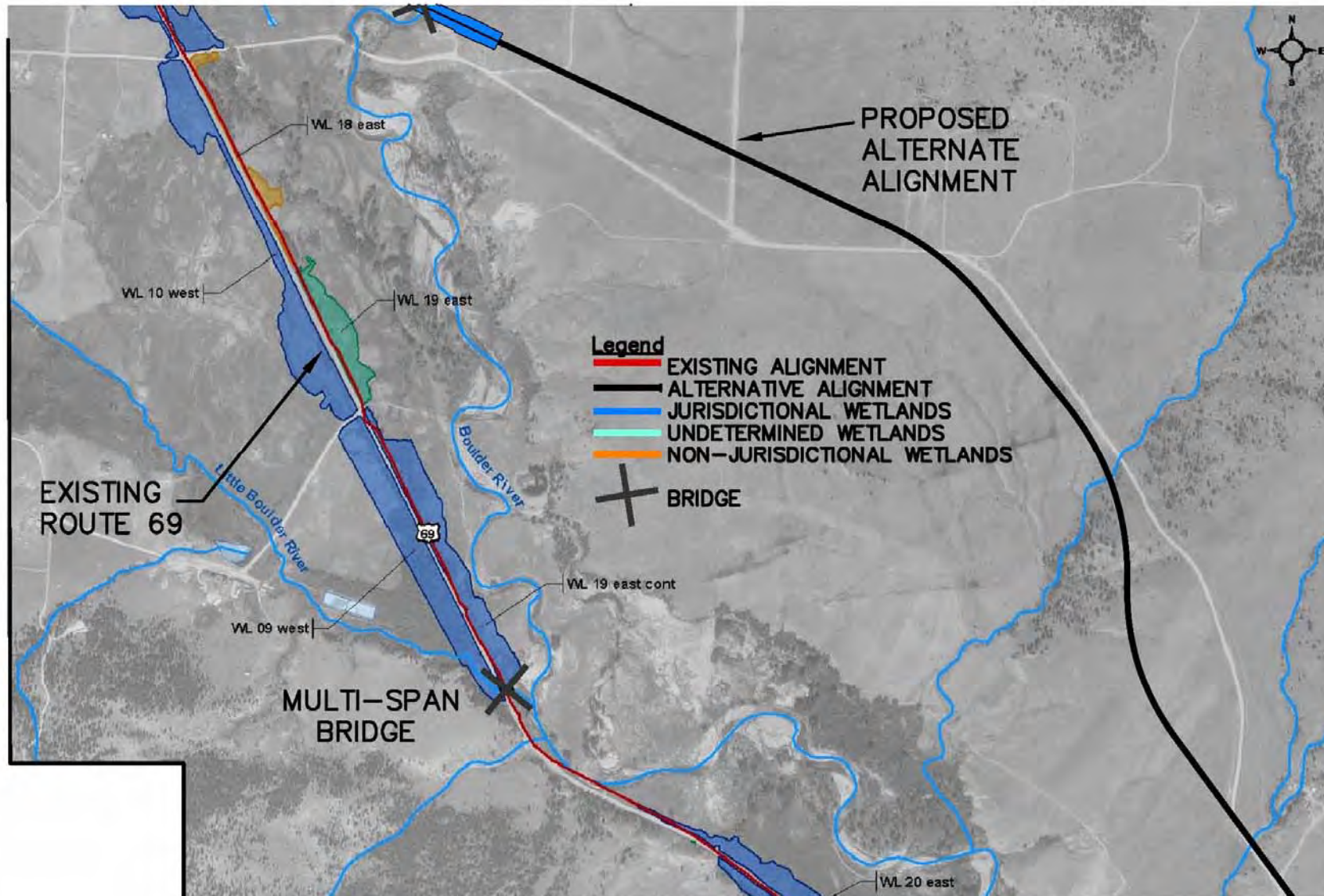
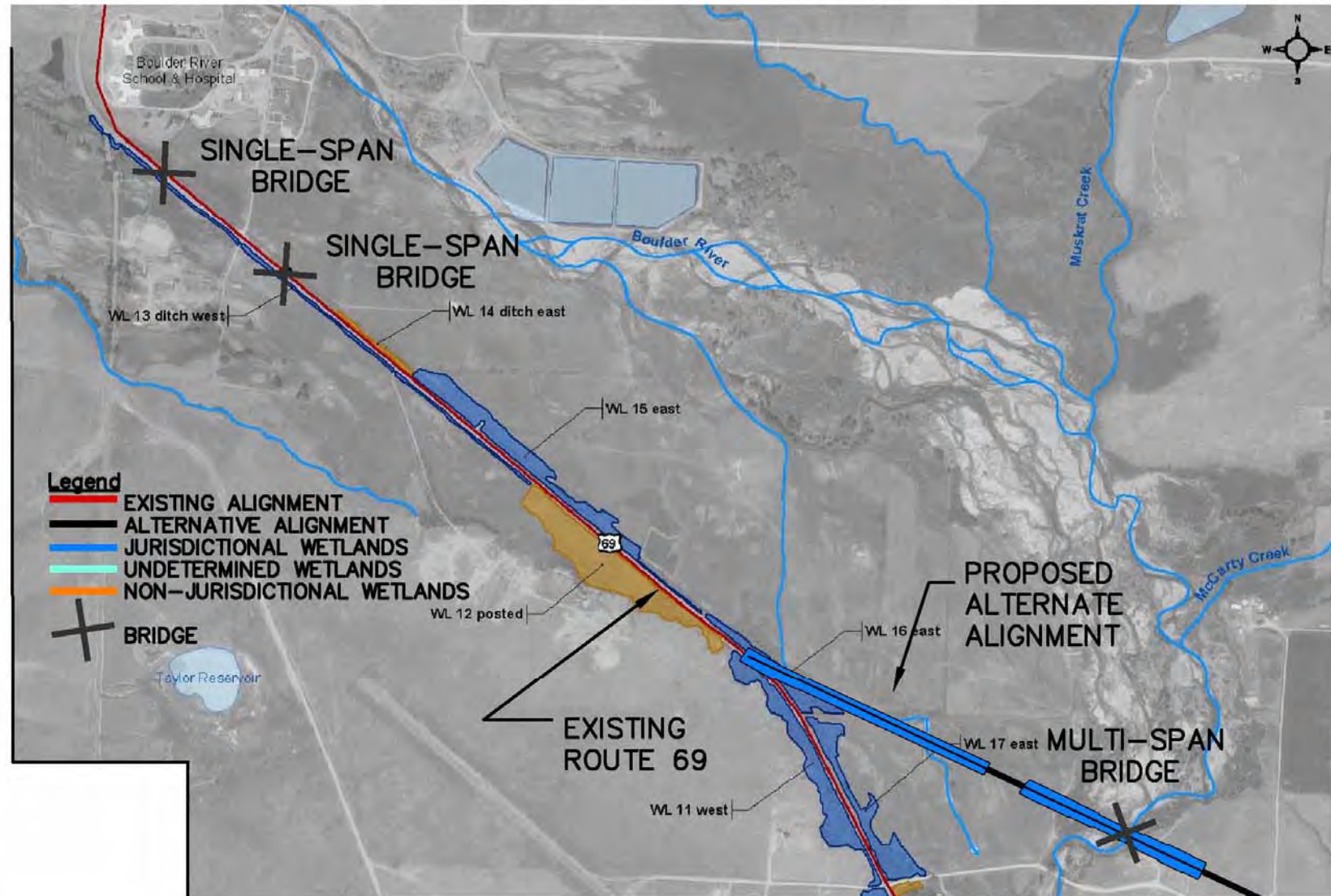


Figure 3-5
Wetland Map



Water Bodies

There are several water bodies located within the project area, including the Boulder River, Elkhorn Creek, Dry Creek, Jack Creek, and a number of unnamed ephemeral streams. Impacts to these water bodies would require further review under any NEPA/MEPA analysis.

Wildlife Resources and Habitat

Field surveys of the existing MT 69 alignment documented several wildlife crossing zones. The area shows signs of high and consistent use by deer, elk, moose, and coyotes. It is likely that smaller mammals use these crossing zones as well. The Boulder River corridor provides good browse, water, cover, and travel habitat to access prominent tributaries draining the uplands to the northeast, such as Browns Gulch. Wildlife use of the alternate alignment corridor is also expected to be high due to migration routes within Deerlodge National Forest.

Species of Concern

No wildlife species of concern were observed during field surveys. A great blue heron rookery with eighty-six birds was documented south of Clark Gulch on the east side of MT 69 in large cottonwoods on the floodplain. Additionally, a mountain plover occurrence was documented in 1994 near Cabin Gulch on the east side of MT 69.

No plant species of concern were observed during field surveys. The project area has potential habitat for Ute ladies' tresses, including meandering wetlands, gravel bars, old oxbows or floodplains at low elevations in open valley bottoms. Other habitat requirements are also present in the project area. An MNHP botanist confirmed that based on soil mapping, there may be Ute ladies' tresses located along the Boulder River, although there have been no observed occurrences.

Fisheries

The Boulder River supports several native fish species, as well as brook, brown, and rainbow trout. Several small trout were observed in shallow areas of the Boulder River and in ditches near their confluences with the Boulder River. No population estimates or quantitative surveys were conducted. Based on site visits, fish habitat in the Boulder River appears to be of good diversity and quality.

The proposed alternatives could be constructed without relocation of the Boulder River, Little Boulder River, or any of the unnamed perennial streams, although placement of bridge structures and culverts may impact fisheries. A study of these impacts would be required under any NEPA/MEPA analysis.

Noxious Weeds

Five species of noxious weeds were found within the project area. These species include spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, leafy spurge, Dalmatian toadflax, and tall buttercup. Any roadway

construction activities in this corridor would have the potential for the spread of noxious weeds and invasive plants.

Floodplains

There are delineated floodplains for the Boulder River throughout much of the corridor. Impacts to floodplains within the project corridor would require further study under any NEPA/MEPA analysis.

Threatened and Endangered Species

No federally-listed species were identified from the NRIS database search. A bald eagle nest was reported by an MDT biologist, although it was not observed in the field.

Hazardous Wastes

Based on an NRIS database search, there are no hazardous waste sites in the project corridor. There are a number of abandoned mine sites located upstream of the project area. Impacts to these sites resulting from the proposed alternatives would require further study under any NEPA/MEPA analysis.

Visual Resources

Views along the river would potentially be disrupted due to reconstruction and widening of the roadway and subsequent loss of trees and other vegetation along the current alignment. Impacts along the county road would also be expected, but with less severe loss of vegetation.

4.0 SCREENING CRITERIA

The purpose of this Alternatives Analysis was to compare the relative pros and cons of the existing MT 69 alignment and the alternate alignment and to determine if one or the other alternative could clearly be eliminated due to a magnitude of projected difference in impacts, costs, or constructability. The following screening criteria were developed for this project with this purpose in mind:

- **Social values** – What are the lifestyle impacts to the surrounding community and the traveling public from the two alternatives?
- **Economic values** – What is the functional value of the roadway facility to the users, and who bears the cost of the proposed improvements?
- **Environmental values** – What resources are most likely to be impacted, how severely, and how can they be mitigated?

5.0 ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS

This section of the feasibility study projects anticipated impacts from right-of-way acquisition, wetland conversion, and bridge construction. Cost criteria are discussed in Section 6.0.

Social Impacts

There are a number of social factors that can be assessed with regard to the proposed improvements. Neighboring residents have quality of life concerns regarding increased noise and traffic levels on the county road, as well as concerns regarding the loss of private land due to new right-of-way required by a new alignment. There is also a broader public concern about safety and accidents along our public highways. These issues are discussed briefly below:

Traffic

Estimated traffic in the year 2024 is projected to be just under 1,900 vehicles per day along MT 69 in this corridor. Truck traffic is estimated to be approximately 17 percent of that volume. While no estimates are available, it can be safely assumed that traffic volumes along the county road would be a small fraction of that projected along MT 69. Shifts in traffic patterns to a new route east of the river would be a noticeable change, but would amount to only about four or five cars per minute during the busiest hour of the day. Conversely, traffic along the existing MT 69 alignment would likely drop to a lower volume than is currently carried on the county road because there are very few residences and local access points on the existing MT 69 alignment as compared to the county road. If the primary travel way were moved east of the river, the existing MT 69 alignment could potentially be more attractive to local and regional recreational users due to its immediate proximity to the Boulder River and much lower traffic volumes.

Right-of-Way

A total of 100 acres of new right-of-way would be required for any new alignment on the east side of the river, most of which is currently in private ownership. This acquisition and the construction of a new roadway would likely result in a direct impact to some farming operations,

movement of cattle, future building plans, and the historic use of the existing county road. Comparably little right-of-way (approximately ten acres) would be required along the existing MT 69 alignment and would have little impact on adjacent uses.

Safety and Accidents

As documented earlier in this report, the accident rates (both in number and in severity) along the existing MT 69 route are substantially higher than on other similar routes across the state. These accidents have resulted in six fatalities in the period between 1994 and 2003. Given the location of accidents, it can be concluded that most accidents are the result of roadway geometry combined with speed, and oftentimes with adverse weather conditions. The portion of MT 69 between MP 31 and MP 35 experiences periodic icing due to the shading from the rock outcropping, and has resulted in higher than average accidents at that location. The proximity of the Boulder River and attendant wildlife also results in vehicle-animal conflicts. Moving the alignment east of the river would address the icing problem because the alternate alignment would not be as shaded as the existing MT 69 alignment. While the alternate alignment may result in fewer vehicle-animal conflicts because the corridor is more open and is not constrained by the Boulder River and rock outcroppings, wildlife movement is still likely in this corridor. Therefore, moving the alignment east of the river would adequately address the shading/icing problem, but may not provide an appreciable difference in vehicle-animal conflicts.

Economic Impacts

When considering the economic effects of roadway improvements, it is important to consider not only the financial cost in terms of taxpayer dollars, but also the cost of delaying improvements, or providing no improvements to the transportation facilities. Unimproved and failing infrastructure imposes a direct cost on those goods and service providers who use the highway system to access Montana communities. These perspectives are discussed briefly below.

Cost of construction

Detailed cost estimates for the two alternatives are provided in the next chapter. For brief comparison, reconstruction of the existing MT 69 alignment is projected to cost approximately \$16 million, while a new alignment would cost nearly \$25 million – approximately a 56 percent difference in projected cost. The alternate alignment would no longer utilize the Red Bridge, which was recently reconstructed at a cost of approximately \$783,000. The substantial difference between the two alternatives in directly related costs, as well as an accounting of the monies spent recently on the Red Bridge project, must play a role in responsible project decision-making.

Opportunity costs

When considering the impacts of infrastructure spending, it is important to recognize the real costs to the providers of goods and services if the most efficient transportation routes are congested, in disrepair, or are unsafe. They must choose either longer routes or accept the liability of traveling on these undesirable routes and pass on the costs to the consumer. Providing no improvements in this corridor would be inconsistent with the mission of the Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration to provide safe and efficient roadways for people and commerce.

Environmental Impacts

As discussed in the Opportunities and Constraints section above, there are only a few areas of environmental concern that would be anticipated to experience any substantive impacts from either alternative. These impacts are discussed in detail below.

Wetland Resources

It is estimated that approximately 45 wetland acres would be impacted by the existing MT 69 alignment alternative. Wetland impacts were estimated by calculating the total right-of-way needed for the proposed reconstruction of the existing MT 69 alignment, excluding the existing roadway area, in locations where wetlands were delineated. The estimate includes impacts to both jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional wetlands.

Total wetland impact acreage along the alternate alignment is estimated to be approximately 30 acres. Between MP 31.1 and MP 35.7, wetland impacts were estimated by calculating the total right-of-way needed for the proposed reconstruction of the alternate alignment in locations where wetlands may exist based on soil mapping, aerial photographs, and windshield survey data. This method produced an acreage estimate which is likely slightly higher than a field survey would produce. Additionally, wetland impacts between MP 30.8 and MP 31.1 and between MP 35.7 to MP 37.1 as calculated for the existing MT 69 alignment were included in the alternate alignment estimate. A field survey would be required to determine a more precise quantity of wetland acreage that would be impacted under the alternate alignment between MP 31.1 to MP 35.7.

Impacted acreage along either the existing MT 69 or alternate alignment will likely generate the need for mitigation. In addition to direct wetland impacts, several ditches may need to be relocated, there may be impacts to wildlife values associated with the network of wetlands, there may be impacts to surface water recharge, and there may be impacts to possible habitat for Ute ladies' tresses associated with wetlands. (Further field work will be necessary to determine if Ute ladies' tresses occur in the proposed project area.) MDT has initiated discussions with Boulder Hot Springs, a landowner on the existing MT 69 alignment, in order to determine if opportunities for mitigation exist.

Construction of either alternative would require consultation and coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (CoE).

Fisheries

Neither of the proposed build alternatives would involve relocation of the Boulder River, Little Boulder River, or any of the unnamed perennial streams.

There are 55 existing culverts located along the existing MT 69 alignment. All existing culverts would be replaced by longer culverts to accommodate road widening on the existing MT 69 alignment. Based on the location of intermittent streams, it was determined that a minimum of 27 culverts would be required along the alternate alignment. Impacts to fisheries resulting from placement of bridge structures and culverts would require further study under any NEPA/MEPA analysis.

Wildlife Habitat

Some initial concern has been raised about having two highways in this valley with the abundant wildlife and their usage of the Boulder River. While little data is available regarding wildlife migration routes in this area, it is safe to assume that wildlife access the river from the Elk Horn Mountains and the Helena National Forest to the east, and from the Deer Lodge National Forest to the west. As described in the traffic discussion above, regardless of which alternate is chosen, one route would remain predominantly a local-access roadway while the other would carry most of the regional traffic. Wildlife would not have any new barriers to cross, but might experience a change in migration routes.

6.0 COST ESTIMATES

Table 6.1 provides a summary of planning-level costs associated with each of the alternatives. The cost estimates are useful for the purpose of comparing the order of magnitude differences in price relative to each alternative. Tables detailing how these costs were calculated follow the narrative explanation of specific cost items. All costs are taken from the January to June 2006 Weighted Average Unit Bid Price Sheet unless otherwise noted.

Table 6.1 Planning-Level Cost Comparison

Item Description	Alternatives	
	Existing Alignment	Alternate Alignment
Clearing and Grubbing*	\$250,000	\$328,000
Remove Existing Pavement	\$129,000	\$33,000
Unclassified Excavation Including Haul	\$903,000	\$1,710,000
Unclassified Borrow	\$0	\$2,222,000
Rock Excavation*	\$66,000	\$0
Base*	\$776,000	\$790,000
Crushed Aggregate Course	\$1,453,000	\$1,469,000
Plant Mix Surfacing Grade S	\$1,110,000	\$1,116,000
Culverts 18" Diameter	\$49,000	\$30,000
24" Diameter*	\$94,000	\$0
36" Diameter	\$101,000	\$188,000
48" Diameter*	\$27,000	\$0
Remove Existing Bridge Structures	\$43,000	\$22,000
New Bridge Structures Single Span 1**	\$136,000	\$136,000
Single Span 2**	\$136,000	\$136,000
Single Span 3**	\$136,000	\$0
Multi Span 1**	\$478,000	\$1,257,000
Multi Span 2**	\$0	\$1,676,000
Painting and Striping	\$41,000	\$41,000
Signing**	\$39,000	\$39,000
Seeding**	\$28,000	\$30,000
Fencing	\$104,000	\$105,000
Wetland Mitigation**	\$1,350,000	\$900,000
Subtotal 1	\$7,449,000	\$12,228,000
Mobilization	\$745,000	\$1,223,000
Miscellaneous	\$1,863,000	\$3,057,000
Subtotal 2	\$10,057,000	\$16,508,000
Planning / Survey / Design	\$1,006,000	\$1,651,000
Traffic Control	\$1,509,000	\$661,000
Construction Contingencies	\$2,515,000	\$4,127,000
Construction Management	\$1,509,000	\$2,477,000
Acquire Right-of-Way**	\$35,000	\$350,000
Total Cost	\$16,631,000	\$25,774,000

* January to December 2005 Weighted Average Unit Bid Price Sheet

** Personal Communication

Narrative Description of Bid Items

The **Clearing and Grubbing** category was calculated as the area from the edge of required right-of-way to the opposite edge of required right-of-way. This category is larger for the alternate alignment than for the existing MT 69 alignment because there is no existing road through the majority of the portion between MP 31.1 and 35.7 for the alternate alignment, with the exception of the county road in a few areas. In contrast, the existing roadway area was subtracted from the total area, resulting in a smaller number for this category for the existing MT 69 alignment.

The **Unclassified Excavation Including Haul and Unclassified Borrow** categories were calculated by modeling the entire valley area based on USGS topographical maps. These categories are larger for the alternate alignment as compared to the existing MT 69 alignment because more earthwork would be involved along the alternate alignment. While the existing MT 69 alignment is mostly flat, the alternate alignment would involve work in more hilly terrain.

The **Base, Crushed Aggregate Course, and Plant Mix Surfacing** categories are slightly larger for the alternate alignment than for the existing MT 69 alignment because the alternate alignment is approximately 0.11 miles longer than the existing MT 69 alignment.

There are four **bridges** along the existing MT 69 alignment, including three single-span bridges and one multi-span bridge. These bridges would be removed and replaced. Two of the existing single-span bridges would also be removed and replaced under the alternate alignment. Additionally, two new bridges would be required along the alternate alignment, both of which would be multi-span bridges. The cost of each multi-span bridge on the alternate alignment is higher than the cost of the multi-span bridge on the existing MT 69 alignment because they are substantially longer.

The **Miscellaneous** category is estimated to be up to 25 percent for this project because of the potential for unknown factors. It includes items such as:

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| • Slope treatment | • Temporary striping | • Seal coat |
| • Watering | • Temporary water | • Guardrail |
| • Ditch or channel excavation | • pollution/erosion control | • Cattle guards |
| • Shoring, cribbing, or extra excavation | • Sawcutting pavement | • Noxious weed control |
| • Asphalt for tack coat | • Fence replacement | • Mail boxes |
| • Incidental asphalt concrete pavement | • Riprap | |
| • Unsuitable excavation | • Public relations | |
| | • Topsoil | |
| | • Traffic gravel | |

Several cost categories are calculated as percentages of construction, including the mobilization and miscellaneous categories. Additionally, the **Planning/Survey/Design, Traffic Control, Construction Contingencies, and Construction Management** categories were calculated as percentages of the respective subtotals noted in Table 6.1. These categories were calculated using the same percentage factors for each alternative, with the exception of Traffic Control. A

smaller percentage was used to calculate Traffic Control for the alternate alignment due to the fact that it could be constructed while the majority of traffic remained on the existing MT 69 alignment. Reconstruction along MT 69 would require substantial traffic control and/or a detour route. The Planning/Survey/Design category does not include the cost of environmental clearance documentation. A construction contingency of 25 percent, the maximum amount recommended by MDT's cost estimation guidelines, was chosen because of the potential for higher cost of right-of-way acquisition in this area than estimated due to lack of landowner support for the project as well as rapid increases in land values in Montana, and what is considered to be a high potential for unknown factors due to the controversial nature of the project.

A larger amount of **right-of-way** would be required for the alternate alignment in comparison to the existing MT 69 alignment mainly because the alternate alignment would involve an almost entirely new alignment between MP 31.1 and 35.7. There are portions of this alignment that parallel the existing county road. Typically, right-of-way along county roads in Montana consists of a 60-foot easement, with 30 feet on each side of the center line. The county road was constructed on an easement, and no right-of-way is owned by either Jefferson County or the state along this route. The total right-of-way calculated for the alternate alignment assumes that there is no existing county right-of-way owned along the county road.

Table 6.2 Calculation of Costs for Existing MT 69 Alignment



 BOULDER SOUTH ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS Planning Level Estimate of Costs				
Existing Alignment				
Item Description	Approx. Quantity	Unit Meas.	Estimated Unit Price	Amount
Clearing & Grubbing	100	AC	\$2,500	\$250,000
Remove Existing Pavement	96,000	SY	\$1.34	\$129,000
Unclassified Excavation Including Haul	217,000	CY	\$4.16	\$903,000
Unclassified Borrow	0	CY	\$10.05	\$0
Rock Excavation	6,000	CY	\$11.00	\$66,000
Base	38,800	CY	\$20.00	\$776,000
Crushed Aggregate Course	85,000	CY	\$17.09	\$1,453,000
Plant Mix Surfacing Grade S	37,700	Ton	\$29.45	\$1,110,000
Culverts				
18" Diameter	1,020	LF	\$47.24	\$49,000
24" Diameter	1,587	LF	\$59	\$94,000
36" Diameter	828	LF	\$121.92	\$101,000
48" Diameter	168	LF	\$159	\$27,000
Remove Existing Bridge Structures	4	LS	\$10,695	\$43,000
New Bridge Structures				
Single Span 1	1,421	SF	\$95	\$136,000
Single Span 2	1,421	SF	\$95	\$136,000
Single Span 3	1,421	SF	\$95	\$136,000
Multi Span 1	4,264	SF	\$112	\$478,000
Multi Span 2	0	SF	\$112	\$0
Painting and Striping	700	Gallons	\$58.45	\$41,000
Signing	1	Lump Sum	\$39,000	\$39,000
Seeding	70	AC	\$400	\$28,000
Fencing	66,528	LF	\$1.55	\$104,000
Wetland Mitigation	45	AC	\$30,000	\$1,350,000
SUBTOTAL 1				\$7,449,000
Mobilization @ 10%	1	Lump Sum	\$745,000	\$745,000
Miscellaneous @ 25%	1	Lump Sum	\$1,862,300	\$1,863,000
SUBTOTAL 2				\$10,057,000
Planning / Survey / Design @ 10%	1	Lump Sum	\$1,006,000	\$1,006,000
Traffic Control @ 15%	1	Lump Sum	\$1,508,600	\$1,509,000
Construction Contingencies @ 25%	1	Lump Sum	\$2,514,300	\$2,515,000
Construction Management @ 15%	1	Lump Sum	\$1,508,600	\$1,509,000
Acquire Right-of-Way	10	AC	\$3,500	\$35,000
TOTAL				\$16,631,000

Table 6.3 Calculation of Costs for Alternate Alignment

 BOULDER SOUTH ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS Planning Level Estimate of Costs				
Alternate Alignment				
Item Description	Approx. Quantity	Unit Meas.	Estimated Unit Price	Amount
Clearing & Grubbing	131	AC	\$2,500	\$328,000
Remove Existing Pavement	24,556	SY	\$1.34	\$33,000
Unclassified Excavation Including Haul	411,000	CY	\$4.16	\$1,710,000
Unclassified Borrow	221,000	CY	\$10.05	\$2,222,000
Rock Excavation	0	CY	\$11.00	\$0
Base	39,500	CY	\$20.00	\$790,000
Crushed Aggregate Course	85,900	CY	\$17.09	\$1,469,000
Plant Mix Surfacing Grade S	37,900	Ton	\$29.45	\$1,116,000
Culverts				
18" Diameter	624	LF	\$47.24	\$30,000
24" Diameter	0	LF	\$59	\$0
36" Diameter	2,180	LF	\$86	\$188,000
48" Diameter	0	LF	\$159	\$0
Remove Existing Bridge Structures	2	LS	\$10,695	\$22,000
New Bridge Structures				
Single Span 1	1,421	SF	\$95	\$136,000
Single Span 2	1,421	SF	\$95	\$136,000
Single Span 3	0	SF	\$95	\$0
Multi Span 1	11,220	SF	\$112	\$1,257,000
Multi Span 2	14,960	SF	\$112	\$1,676,000
Painting and Striping	700	Gallons	\$58.45	\$41,000
Signing	1	Lump Sum	\$39,000	\$39,000
Seeding	75	AC	\$400	\$30,000
Fencing	67,690	LF	\$1.55	\$105,000
Wetland Mitigation	30	AC	\$30,000	\$900,000
SUBTOTAL 1				\$12,228,000
Mobilization @ 10%	1	Lump Sum	\$1,223,000	\$1,223,000
Miscellaneous @ 25%	1	Lump Sum	\$3,057,000	\$3,057,000
SUBTOTAL 2				\$16,508,000
Planning / Survey/ Design @ 10%	1	Lump Sum	\$1,651,000	\$1,651,000
Traffic Control @ 4%	1	Lump Sum	\$660,300	\$661,000
Construction Contingencies @ 25%	1	Lump Sum	\$4,127,000	\$4,127,000
Construction Management @ 15%	1	Lump Sum	\$2,476,200	\$2,477,000
Acquire Right-of-Way	100	AC	\$3,500	\$350,000
TOTAL				\$25,774,000

7.0 PUBLIC AND AGENCY CONCERNS

A Public Scoping Meeting was held on June 1, 2005. Approximately 100 members of the public were in attendance and over 50 written comments were submitted. The majority of these comments were strongly opposed to the proposed alternate alignment. Residents cited concerns relating to wildlife crossings; safety issues, especially regarding increased traffic volumes near rural residences; noise; increased traffic; and potential impacts to rural character and lifestyle. Residents also expressed concerns about habitat fragmentation and the fragmentation of farms and ranches located along the alternate alignment. In addition to the written comments, 27 people spoke at the public meeting in opposition to the proposed alternate alignment. Many area residents expressed a desire to reduce speeds and truck traffic on the existing MT 69 alignment.

A transcript of the public meeting, written comments received at the meeting, letters from the Jefferson County Commission and the Jefferson County Planning Board, and newspaper articles about the June 2005 public meeting are attached in Appendices A through D.

8.0 CONCLUSION

Based on this preliminary evaluation of the two conceptual alternatives, there is no clear preferred alternative. Reconstruction of the existing MT 69 alignment is over nine million dollars less expensive than construction of a new alignment across the river. This cost savings is provided through shorter bridge structures, less earthwork, and ten times less right-of-way. The alternate alignment would have approximately double the maintenance cost on an annual basis because if it was built, MDT would bear the responsibility of maintaining both the existing and alternate alignments. The most substantial drawback to the existing MT 69 alignment is the difference in wetland impacts. Construction of a new alignment on the other side of the river would reduce wetland impacts by at least 15 acres compared to reconstruction of the existing MT 69 alignment. This difference would need to be justified in the 404 permitting process. Table 8.1 provides a summary of costs and impacts related to the two alternatives.

Table 8.1
Summary Comparison Matrix

Criteria	Alternatives	
	Existing MT 69 Alignment	Alternate Alignment
Construction Cost	\$16,631,000	\$25,774,000
Yearly Road Maintenance Costs (including bridge maintenance)	\$13,857	\$27,956*
Route Mileage from MP 30.8 to MP 37.1	6.3 miles	6.41 miles
New Right-of-Way	10 acres	100 acres
Impacted Wetland Acreage	45 acres	30 acres

*\$13,857 yearly maintenance cost for existing alignment + \$14,099 annual cost for alternate alignment.

Coordination with the CoE will be necessary to determine feasibility of Section 404 permitting on either alignment. It would also be wise to continue discussions with the Boulder Hot Springs to determine whether wetland mitigation is feasible in the immediate project area, or if other wetland mitigation opportunities need to be identified in the Boulder Valley.

APPENDIX A

Public Meeting Transcript

**BOULDER-SOUTH
PUBLIC MEETING**

CN2019

**Jefferson High School
Boulder, MT
6:30 p.m. – June 1, 2005**

WELCOME

(John Robinson) Hello everyone, thank you all for coming tonight. It is really important that you all showed up because, as you've seen in the newspaper and in the advertisement, we have not made a decision about this project yet and your opinions and comments and concerns are very important in the decision-making process for this project.

My name is John Robinson. I'm from the Public Involvement Section of the Montana Department of Transportation. The purpose of the meeting tonight is to get your comments and concerns on two options we have for reconstruction of Highway 69 South of Boulder. The entire project is approximately 15 miles long. It begins at milepost 22.2 south of the Elkhorn turn off and proceeds in this direction (referring to graphic). The project proceeds this way, follows this line, and here is the Elkhorn turn off (referring to graphic). On this section, the roadway would be widened and resurfaced. From the Elkhorn turn off, we have two options: we can either stay with the remaining alignment and take this route where it now stands all the way up to Boulder at the end point; or, because of the impacts to the wetlands, we need to examine the option of going up on the county road and taking a new alignment away from the wetlands.

I want to say that whenever there is a construction or reconstruction project, which has such significant impacts to the environment and/or social impacts on the project, we usually do an Environmental Assessment. Whenever there is a project with these types of impacts, the Federal Highway Administration requires us to look at different alternatives and options so they understand that no matter what the decision is we have also looked at other options other than filling wetlands. So that is the purpose of this meeting. This meeting is not to make a decision tonight on which route might be taken or which alignment, but the meeting tonight is to hear your concerns and your comments about the project and which option you prefer. We want to hear from you whether you think this is good or bad or whether you prefer this way.

With these impacts, we knew we were possibly going to have to have an Environmental Assessment, so we hired an outside consulting firm to conduct a fair and factual Environmental Assessment and that consultant is Darryl James. Darryl is the project engineer from HKM Inc. out of Helena. Darryl will explain and describe the Environmental Assessment and the process to you so that everyone has a full understanding of the study that will take place. The study will also examine the comments you give us tonight.

I would like to make some introductions from MDT: Jeff Ebert, the District Administrator for the Butte District; Joe Olsen is the District II Engineering Services Supervisor from the Butte District, he is the number two man under Jeff Ebert; Jim Davies, the District Project Engineer. No matter what option is decided upon, Jim and his crew from Road Design will be overseeing the road design of the project. Bob Tholt, the Project engineer from Consultant Design. From Jefferson County we have Mr. Chuck Nutbohm, Jefferson County Commissioner and Ken Weber is also here with us. He is also a County Commissioner.

Our meetings always follow the same format. First the Engineers will give a presentation and details of the project. We ask you to please hold your comments or questions until they complete their presentations. First Jeff Ebert, the District Administrator, will give a brief overview of the project. After Jeff is done, then Darryl James will give his presentation on the details and the process for the Environmental Assessment. Again please hold your questions, comments and concerns until after Darryl has completed his presentation. At that time we will open it up for your questions and comments. I will come to you and hold the microphone so that the sound works properly. We want to know if you favor an option and why you favor that option. If you are against an option, we want to know why. Again your comments will be used in the Environmental Assessment. No decisions have been made on this project.

Please see the comment form that I gave you earlier. We usually have a 30-day comment period on our projects, but because of the impacts and the importance to you of this project, we've decided to extend it to almost 45 days. The comment can be given in written form and sent to Jeff Ebert. His mailing address is on that sheet in bold type. Or you can email the consultant, Darryl James. His email address is also on this form. With that I will turn it over to Mr. Jeff Ebert. Thank you.

PRESENTATION: (Jeff Ebert, MDT)

Good evening. Thank you all for coming tonight to this very important meeting concerning the reconstruction of the Montana 69 Highway south of Boulder. I want to give you a brief background of where we are, where we've gone, and where we are headed with the project that we are contemplating doing here.

The Boulder South project was first nominated by the Department in the summer of 1991. At that time we felt we were going to get a fairly large increase in funding under the Transportation Act at the time. We felt that funding would be available in the 1998 construction season. As we all well know, that 1998 date came and went. The reason is that we didn't get as much funding from the federal government to do the project so it got put off for a period of time.

The reconstruction project that we started out with started down at milepost 22 and went to the southern boundary limits of Boulder. In 1992, a thin-lift overlay was placed on the section from south of Boulder down to the Elkhorn turn off, and again in 1997 another thin-lift overlay was

placed on the section from the Elkhorn turnoff down to the other end of the project – the southern end. We did that because the reconstruction funds were not available and we needed something to hold the roadway together. Then in the spring of 2004, this project was basically reactivated in our system. Again, based on funding we feel we are going to receive. We are kind of in the same position we were in back in 1991 relaying on estimates of federal funding we would receive to do this project.

Currently right now we are looking at starting over from scratch. We did some preliminary work back in 1991 and 1992 when the project was first placed on the system, but since that time standards have changed, so we are basically going to start from scratch again. Survey work was started last fall in 2004. You've probably seen some of our guys out there doing some survey work on the project. We had a public information press release that was published in October and November of 2004 basically re-announcing that the project was going to be started. During that time period we determined that, because of the alternatives that were being proposed, we would probably need to do an Environmental Assessment, and as John mentioned we went ahead and hired HKM to do that Environmental Assessment. We just got them under contract within the last month or so and the first order of business to get going on was to hold this public information meeting.

Right now the way the funding looks, and we are still kind of up in the air because the Transportation Bill currently expired in 2003 and we have been going on extensions for about a month and a half. But we still feel with the amount of the projects we currently have in the program and with the cost of this project that we would have funding for this to go to contract in November of 2008, which would mean that construction would not occur until 2009. So we are a few years out yet but again we are just getting started on this project.

The budget right now to do the construction engineering is in the \$16-17 million range. Because of the two different scopes we are talking about with the widening and resurfacing on the southern portion and then the full reconstruction on the northern portion, the project will probably be split into two projects for construction but that is still yet to be determined.

With that, I guess I will turn it over to Darryl James and have him talk to you a little bit about the Environmental Assessment and then some of the specifics of the project. Thank you all again for coming tonight.

PRESENTATION: (Darryl James, HKM)

Thanks to everybody for coming tonight. I'm going to walk through a couple of things real briefly here just to kind of explain the process and what we are here for tonight. The first thing is, just to stress again and both John and Jeff mentioned it, no decisions have been made to date on this project regardless of what you've heard in the past. I'm very impressed by the turnout, but there is a reason you are here. There is always the history of the big, bad Department of

Transportation over the last 40-50 years coming through and building a highway and it doesn't matter what you guys think. But the National Environmental Policy Act and the Montana Environmental Policy Act set up a process to make sure that your concerns are heard and that we really take a comprehensive look at all the social, environmental, and economic impacts on any federal aid project.

There is a little diagram on the back of your information sheet you picked up when you came in. What we are doing right now is called "scoping". It is a matter of coming out, hearing what your concerns are in the community, and then identifying all of the social, economic, and environmental conditions within the project area. I'll walk through some of those issue areas might be in a minute.

Again, our role as HKM, MDT is going to be doing the design work on this project, we are just here to assist and to make sure they consider all the issues, the concerns that you have, and the things the resource agencies are going to be paying attention to as we go into permitting and construction of this project.

Issue areas that are of concern to the MEPA and NEPA guidelines – things like land use, public right-of-way, adjacent farmlands, public lands, those kinds of things that are actually protected by different federal permitting processes or regulations. Farmlands, social conditions, if they've got a project that might impact community cohesion or bisect farmlands or things like that we will be taking a look at those. Economic impacts of the highway project, pedestrian/bicycle facilities, air quality, noise, and water quality are all environmental concerns. There are quite a few high quality wetlands in this corridor that we have to consider and try to minimize impacts to those. Water bodies and wildlife habitat, floodplains, threatened and endangered species, historic and archeological and paleontological resources, hazardous waste and visual resources. These are all specifically outlined in the MEPA and NEPA guidelines as things we have to pay attention to and account for any impact to any of those resource areas.

The purpose of the project. It is pretty simple – to provide safety upgrades to this corridor. MDT has identified some accident clusters throughout this corridor that they need to try and address for re-design and basically provide a facility with updated design features. Whenever the Department of Transportation goes to construct or reconstruct a roadway, they solicit funds from the Highway Federal Administration. They have a certain level of design we need to meet in order to spend those funds. So they could not come back out here and basically reconstruct this roadway without making some basic geometric improvements. The radius of the curves is too sharp, again based on current standards.

Design objectives. I just kind of put these together to give you a general idea of things that we might be working on and that I would like your input on later tonight and to find out if there other things we ought to consider during this process. We want to minimize impacts to the Boulder River. We've got an area here that is very narrowly confined and we need to try and

minimize those impacts to the river, minimize impacts to the wetlands, minimize impacts to adjacent farmlands. We need to always try to provide cost-effective improvements. Jeff noted the difficulty in the federal funding package right now, it's been delayed a number of months and that means projects get backed up and construction costs are going up; the cost of steel and concrete have been going through the roof. It just means that MDT cuts back on the number of projects they can complete within a fiscal cycle or in a construction season. We also need to avoid or minimize impacts to cultural and historic resources. We understand that this valley has a quite a history that dates back to pre-white settlers. So we understand there are quite a few resources in the corridor that we need to be aware of.

Evaluation criteria that we might use. Does it meet current MDT standards? Does it meet current AASHTO guidelines? Again, that is what Federal Highways is going to be paying attention to in saying can we commit funds to this project. There is a certain level of design you need to be achieving for a reconstruction project. Are the improvements cost effective? Does it minimize impacts to the natural environment?

Jeff and John also mentioned that we've got two alternatives. Under NEPA we actually start out with three different alternatives: One is a no-build. We can always go through this assessment and determine that doing nothing is the best option. I doubt anybody here is going to jump up and say "let's go home and we'll call it good." Everybody recognizes that some improvements are probably warranted. Whether that means just overlaying what we have or trying to correct some of the areas where we know there are accident clusters and icing and sheeting issues – those are things we need to try and address. So basically that what I want to talk about real quick tonight – what these three options really mean. Then we have two other people here with HKM, Jennifer Peterson and Sarah Nickolie. They are going to walk through just an exercise in trying to solicit some more specific comments from you tonight. I'm going to try and make this real brief – we are really here tonight to hear from you.

Again this is the scoping part of our process (referring to graphic on back of handout). We start with the scoping process. We will go through the development of alternatives with the Department of Transportation in response to the comments we get from you, the research we do out in the field identifying wetlands, identifying where the stream encroachments might be, where do we have prime farmlands, where do we have ranch accesses or county roads that we need to maintain access to, and those kinds of things. Once we've got a real good clear picture of what the constraints are and what opportunities we have for improvements, we will work with MDT to further refine either these alternatives or other alternatives that you may help us with. Then we move into the Alternative Analysis phase where we go into detailed assessment of all those impacts – to quantify wetlands impacts and report those to the Corp of Engineers and start working on permit applications and those kinds of things. Then we will develop the Environmental Assessment. That is an official public document that again discloses all the environmental constraints, the proposed impacts, and the cost of the project. All those things are documented and will be available for your review and comment. It also goes to all of the

affected agencies. It is out there for a 30-45 day period. We will take all your comments. During that review period, we will also have another meeting – a formal public hearing to accept comments and any responses from MDT, and Federal Highway will issue either a Revised Environmental Assessment or a Finding of No Significant Impact and that will be the decision document for this project. Or if it looks like the impacts are too severe or there is just an outstanding amount of controversy over something that wasn't disclosed or we missed, then it kicks you into a full Environmental Impact Statement. We are going to try and avoid that. So that in general is the process. Are there any immediate questions on any of that material?

Q: The timeline for the Environmental Assessment.

A: Federal Highways right now is trying to stick to about an 18-month schedule for an EA. I think that is pretty reasonable for this project.

I want to re-iterate where the project is right now and how we've come to develop the alternatives that are shown and explain some of the environmental constraints that we are aware of and want to ask you if you are aware of other constraints we need to be identifying. If you know of cultural or historic resources in this corridor particularly areas that are heavy wildlife crossings, or anything that you may think are pertinent to helping with the design of these different alternatives.

As John mentioned, basically from the southern end to the Elkhorn turnoff is a minor widening overlay. The reset of the project corridor is a complete reconstruction. Once you get basically north of the Elkhorn turnoff, you can see how close we get to the Boulder River Referring to graphic). That is really the most difficult part of this project – trying to fit this winding roadway into a very narrowly constrained corridor. You've got the river on one side, you have some homes on the other, and you've got some rock outcrops. It just gets very narrow. That is basically what prompted the Department of Transportation to look at an alternative across the river to get out away from some of these rock cuts, away from the sheeting areas, and away from impacting the river and some very high quality wetlands which are sometimes very, very difficult to mitigate. Again, that is what prompted the orange lineup here on the other side basically in the county road corridor. Again basically from there into town is a reconstruct on the existing lineup.

I ask you to hold your questions until I go through this real quick and then for the question and answer, if you will raise your hand John will come around with a microphone and we will try and get to everybody. John is recording the meeting this evening so we want to make sure that we have a microphone in front of everybody so we can accurately record any comments we get from you.

I know everybody is a little excited about this orange line – just to tell you again; it is literally what you see. It is a tape line on the aerial just to say that this is an idea – there has been no

design work done on either one of these things. It is truly prompted to try and go through these minimizations right here. We need to try and avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands and these streams basically because it is a bear to try and get those things permitted any more. It can be done, but the Corp of Engineers – let me back up and explain this. The National Environmental Policy Act, this NEPA process, is basically a public disclosure process. It is designed to make sure that we walk through all of the other regulatory requirements in a public process so you understand how the decisions are made. One of the most critical applications in this corridor is going to be permitting for wetland impacts. The Corp of Engineers has very specific requirements – you have to avoid first, minimize second, and then mitigate third. They are requiring mitigation within the same watershed for a lot of these MDT projects. So that is going to be a big challenge if we've got substantial impacts to wetlands, finding an area to buy the right-of-way, create new wetlands, and then maintain those over a number of years. Again, just to let you know what some of the challenges are with the existing alignment.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

(John Robinson) I'd like to ask everyone to state your name for the record so that we know who was speaking. That way when Darryl reviews the questions and comments, he can know which landowner said what.

Q: (Paul Richards) I'd like to point out I-15 over here (referring to graphic). The interstate is designed for high-speed truck traffic. We've spent many years on this; many of us in the valley are trying to have the high-speed truck traffic on the interstate where it belongs. The accident clusters you are talking about are because the drivers are driving a rural secondary road that is not designed for high-speed truck traffic. I would ask you, as our employees, to get the trucks on the interstate where they belong. Once you get the trucks off of this site, then we can talk bike paths, pedestrian walkways all along this site; we can talk protection of the rural characteristics of this particular stretch here. Number one, it is very frustrating to see the truck traffic over here that should be on the interstate coming through here. Number two, the weigh station isn't being manned so we are not getting anybody weighed so that is not slowing them down. We don't have any police enforcement there and it is time we put the whole package together and get thorough speeding enforcement, weigh station manned 24-hours a day, the speeding enforcement manned 24-hours a day. Those two things alone are going to push the traffic onto the interstate where we need it. That's going to drop your projections phenomenally. Thank you.

A: (Darryl James) Thank you.

Q: (Charlie Sperry) I live out on Hwy 69. I have a clarifying question. On the alternative that would maintain the existing highway route, what would need to be done to widen or

reconstruct the highway along the river corridor? What action would take place that would potentially impact the river corridor?

A: (Darryl James) There has been no design work done. I'm sure the Department, and we can ask Jim or somebody in the back, if they have identified specific curves. The radius on these curves would need to be reviewed to see if they meet current standards. I'm assuming they do not. So to bring these into a current design standard would likely encroach on the river, plus the widening. I think we are looking at about a 35-foot roadway top, so with different crossroads and wider shoulders on the roadway, the wider section, flatter curves, you are undoubtedly going to be into the river and the wetlands in that existing corridor.

Q: (Charlie Sperry) You are talking about the stream, is that on the river channel? My question is are you talking about straightening the river channel to accommodate the highway straightening? What exactly would happen?

A: (Darryl James) It could be a re-alignment of the river channel. Some moving it away, probably straightening portions. Again it is frowned on by the resource agencies if we have a different alternative. It would involve some stream alteration.

Q: (Karalee Bancroft) I have three things to say: one's a comment and two are questions. The first comment is that I agree with Paul that a lot of the problems we are having are a result of traffic avoiding other alternate routes rather than using this because this is the most logical one. A lot of the traffic we are getting should really be on Hwy 287 going from Helena down to I-90. They avoid that because they get ticketed there. Ok? They come down to Boulder and cut down Hwy 69. So yes, traffic should be pushed back onto I-15 where it belongs and a lot of it should be on Hwy 287. If we were to widen portions of the existing road so the police could enforce the speed limits, we would eliminate a lot of problems right there. That is my comment overall.

The first question I have is what happens to the old Hwy 69 if we were to go along with this orange line that you have on the charts?

A: (Darryl James) That's a good question, thanks for asking that. Generally what you have now is the county road on the north side is a gravel two-lane roadway. The county has already entered into discussions with the Department of Transportation, just general casual conversations about what might happen here. If the Department of Transportation were to come over and construct this orange alignment, MDT has agreed to basically do an overlay, a chip seal overlay, on the existing alignment and would turn that over to the county. The county would then own and maintain this existing alignment basically from the Elkhorn turnoff up to this point (referring to graphic). So basically it would just be a flip-flop in ownership of those two alignments.

- Q: (Karalee Bancroft) My second question is this whole project appears to be contingent on federal funds, is that correct?
- A: (Darryl James) Almost any MDT project is heavily contingent on federal funds.
- Q: (Karalee Bancroft) Ok, why does that have to be? Why do we have to follow federal regulations for this secondary road if it is not designed for that, nor do any of us want that? We don't want the traffic; we want it to be local for farmers and moving our product and stuff. Why do we need to go to federal mandates and have the road brought up to federal standards? Why can't we just do this with our own funds? Do what is needed as opposed to making these huge changes to appease federal departments.
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Let me go ahead and ... I guess your question is why we have to do this to this secondary road? Let me correct that by saying this is actually a State Primary Highway. The Montana Transportation Commission actually ... this has been a State Primary Highway for a number of years ... even back in 1991 when it was first nominated. In order to get federal aid participation we have to meet their standards. We do not have state funds to do any improvements to this road.
- Q: (Karalee Bancroft) Why is that a problem? Why do we have to do anything? Why do we need those federal funds? Why do we have to have outsiders come in and construct all of this stuff on our property to allow other outsiders to speed down our valley?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) We have identified locations out here that have safety concerns and we need to address those safety concerns. As a part of the federal aid funding package we can go in and do spot fixes out here if that is what we are hearing tonight from the majority of folks. That may be an alternative we choose.
- Q: (Barbara Rashleigh) I commute daily on Hwy 69 to Whitehall, and I'll tell you where the accidents are. I follow trucks that play stupid games with the cars. They slow down and when you go to pass them, they speed up when there's two trucks together. So I agree with everybody, keep the trucks on the Interstate and that will stop a lot of the crashes on Hwy 69.
- Q: (Allen LeMeiux) My question deals with the alternative road as compared to the one you are planning to turn over to the county if you go that way. How does that impact the county financing? Does the county have to pay for all maintenance from then on? And why would we want to do that if that is the case? Why wouldn't we leave it the way it is where the state is paying for the maintenance?

A: (Darryl James) The county is paying for maintenance on this route here. So they would be picking up the maintenance of the shorter route and it is a paved route. The county apparently has expressed interest in doing that.

Q: (Allen LeMieux) Is that about the same cost then or would it be different?

A: (Darryl James) I don't know that I could answer that very effectively. I would assume that long term it would be less costly to maintain the paved route than this longer gravel route.

Q: (Allen LeMieux) Well I'd like to see the county start paving more roads then. Let me add one other thing. On this curve coming into Boulder, you are following the same old route, as I understand it. That is a very poor curve. Has anybody addressed that question?

A: (Darryl James) We will address that question as we get into design, the detailed design will look at that curve and see what design speed it is and whether it needs to be redesigned or anything like that. That will be addressed as we move into the design phase.

Q: (Allen LeMieux) My last question for now, how much new land would be taken on the old road as compared with new wetlands on the new road?

A: (Darryl James) Again it is so early in the design process, there is no way to even venture a guess on that but it will be quantified as we move forward with these alternatives. You will be able to look at that and be able to weigh that decision for yourselves.

Let me stop for just a second and explain the cards that Jennifer and Sarah passed out a few minutes ago. I just want to get some feedback from you on some specific questions just to try and get a little bit of dialogue going. If any of you have already filled this out, please hold them up and I'll have Jennifer and Sarah pick those up. We will try and summarize some of the recurring themes on these comment cards. At your leisure please fill these out tonight and hopefully you will give them back to either Jennifer or Sarah and again we will try and summarize some of the comments.

Q: (Mark Steketee) I just want to ask a couple of questions. I think Mr. Ebert you said that Hwy 69 is now a major highway?

A: (Jeff Ebert) It is a state primary road.

Q: (Mark Steketee) Is that the same as a minor arterial?

A: (Jeff Ebert) No.

Q: (Mark Steketee) In your preliminary field report, has the highway changed since your report was developed?

A: (Jeff Ebert) Yes, a minor arterial ... it is the functional classification of the roadway. The state designation be it primary, secondary, interstate, is a federal designation and/or a state designation, but AASHTO (American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials) puts out a pecking order as far as the classification of roadways with interstate highways being the highest classification, a national highway being the second classification of which the interstate is a portion of that. Then there is what's called a principle arterial, and those are the national highways also. There is also then a minor arterial of which this is that classification which coincides with a primary and a minor arterial ... they are kind of one and the same. A national highway and a principal arterial are kind of one and the same. Then a major collector is a secondary highway and that has a lower classification.

Q: (Mark Steketee) Is that volume related? In other words, does a minor arterial design for 208 trucks per day?

A: (Jeff Ebert) Volume is one aspect of that, but they look at the connectivity between major cities, farm-to-market routes, and those types of routes. But volume is a small consideration on how roadways are classified under that classification system.

Q: (Mark Steketee) The second question I have is relative to the accident clusters. In your preliminary field report you indicated there were no feasible counter-measures to address specific crash trends. Are you saying that you have now identified?

A: (Jeff Ebert) The analysis that was performed on those particular accident clusters kept in mind what are some of the small things we can do to correct the crashes that are occurring at those locations. By small things I mean, could you come in there and simply flatten the slopes of the roadway adjacent to a narrow section of a steep section of the roadway, or could you put up curve signs that would better delineate that curve that is upcoming. Under our Safety Engineering Improvement Program we look at those crash locations statewide and under that program, it is fairly cost constraining because we have to do a benefit cost – look at the number of accidents that would be reduced by doing that fix. Then taking that fix and as long as the fix has a benefit greater than one, then we can do a safety project. But what is being talked about in that report is that there were no cost beneficial types of fixes short of doing a full reconstruction through that corridor to mitigate those crash locations.

Q: (Mark Steketee) Is speed part of the accident severity? In other words do we feel that part of the reason the accidents severity for trucks is 70% greater is because of the speed of the trucks?

A: (Jeff Ebert) I don't think speed is figured in the severity. What they look at with severity is the results of the crash. Obviously speed is a factor within that; the faster you are going the more damage that is going to occur. But overall, this is a speed issue and the gentleman up here touched on it, the State Legislature sets the speed limit through here. It is mandated 70 mph for trucks and cars ... when I say trucks I mean pickup trucks. The truck speed limit for commercial traffic is 60 mph.

Q: (Terry Minow) I support improving the safety of Hwy 69 but I'm opposed to the re-routing of Hwy 69 and I'm opposed to rebuilding the highway in a way that will increase the speed and the traffic on Hwy 69. My opposition is based on three major concerns: first of all I'm concerned that neither one of these proposals will improve safety. The problem of safety on the highway is due to excessive speed and to the number of trucks using the road. You've heard that from a number of people already. If you just make the road wider and take out the curves, you are actually going to increase the speed. The traffic is already too fast. The proposed changes will make the speed that much more of a problem.

Secondly, I'm concerned about the impact on our rural lifestyle. Moving the highway will make it more difficult for ranchers to move cows and equipment. They do that every day on that road. People in the area use the back road (as we call it) to bike, to walk, to ride horses, to teach our kids to drive. I take it in the winter when it is too much to face a semi on a blinding blizzard.

Third, I think it is really important to maintain the beauty of the existing highway and I don't think you have considered that in your proposals. Highway 69 is a gorgeous road especially through the canyon. The trees and the foliage in the fall are spectacular. I don't want to see the trees and the foliage and the vegetation stripped out of the area in order to make a huge expanse of pavement.

I suggest the State consider the following ideas immediately in the interest of improving safety and minimizing accidents, and I don't think we have to wait until 2008 or 2009. We need to beef up enforcement of the speed limit on Hwy 69. Ticket those trucks that are running people off the road and passing on curves and over hills. Do whatever it takes to slow down traffic. I think that is in the power of the State right now. Ban semi trucks from using Hwy 69. An exception, of course, should be made for local trucks, but I don't see why we can't ban them. Lower the speed limit for trucks. There is no way that a truck can go 60 mph through the canyon and be safe around those curves.

I think the goal of improving Hwy 69 is an admirable one and I appreciate that, however, I believe these proposals are going to have unintended consequences of actually making the safety worse. I ask you to refocus your proposal on the goal of improving the safety of Hwy 69 while maintaining the rural economy, lifestyle, and beauty of the Boulder Valley.

Q: (All Martini) I just wanted to point out here and have you clarify something about the road maintenance. You said the county would take over the maintenance of the existing road now? But the county is also going to have to still maintain the old gravel road with your new alignment, correct? Now let me clarify that – if there is only a little stretch there that the county wouldn't have to maintain that goes right where you're pointing to (referring to graphic).

A: (Darryl James) That is a good point. If the Department of Transportation comes through with something generally along this orange alignment, all of this would be obliterated. It would be taken out. The ownership would basically revert to an adjacent landowner or there would be some right-of-way negotiation. The other roadway, be they county roads or private access, would be extended to meet up with this new alignment. Something like this you may have to come in with an extended roadway here (referring to graphic). But this would all be taken out. This would be the primary route through that area and any other access that currently meets up with that county road would be extended to the new alignment.

Q: (Al Martini) So the county is going to have to come down the new alignment and maintain 200 feet of road to come into my driveway, go down the new alignment and maintain 100 feet of road to go to somebody else's driveway then?

A: (Darryl James) No it would be a private driveway.

Q: (Al Martini) So I would have to maintain another 100 feet of driveway then?

A: (Darryl James) That's right.

Q: (Scott Mendenhall) I represent HD 77, which includes this area. I have some questions for Mr. Ebert. On the proposed alternative, let's assume the Department decides to choose that. Has the Department contacted any of the landowners along that area in terms of ... has the Department secured any of that property over there at all?

A: (Jeff Ebert) No we have not. We have not secured any of the right-of-way. Again just as Darryl mentioned, this is just a piece of orange tape on our aerial photograph. We have not done any of that.

- Q: (Scott Mendenhall) If you make that decision, then what is the process for acquiring the property?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Before we could acquire any right-of-way, we would have to complete the Environmental Assessment. In the EA the decision would be made whether ... and I'm not supporting this and I'm not saying that we would go along that line; we would then start right-of-way negotiations with the affected landowners. We would come out, bring them a set of plans, and show them on paper, then also we would go out and stake out what right-of-way we would need to build the project and what right-of-way would then revert back and those type of things. But it wouldn't be until after this Environmental Assessment is done. So that's probably two to three years out.
- Q: (Scott Mendenhall) So if a landowner doesn't agree to sell to you then what happens?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) I guess we would negotiate and if we could not come to an agreement, we would utilize Eminent Domain and use that route. But again, that is a last resort.
- Q: (Scott Mendenhall) My understanding of the law of Eminent Domain, there has to be a clearly established public need, is that right?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Exactly, and that is what the Environmental Assessment does. Before we even get to that point the Environmental Analysis will look at those impacts in a pretty macro sense and decide whether or not that is an alternative even worth pursuing.
- Q: (Scott Mendenhall) Do you think the State would have any difficulty establishing a clear public need when there is an existing right-of-way and roadway in place such that would justify using the law of Eminent Domain?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) The only way I could see that occur is if the environmental impacts that were talked about on the current alignment were significant in comparison to that. Then we would pick that alternative. And that would then drive the Purpose and Need for us exercising Eminent Domain. But again, we are way ahead of that decision.
- Q: (Scott Mendenhall) Just in comment then, I think one of the criteria the Department should consider is whether or not they would be violating state law and potentially bringing the liability on the State because of a misuse of the law of Eminent Domain. Because clearly I believe you will have a hard time proving the need when there is an existing roadway and a right-of-way here as opposed to takings of private property. So I would re-echo some of the sentiment here, and urge the Department to please steer away from that alternative that is described there in orange and stick with looking at improving the existing roadway.

I would also ask a question of Mr. Ebert, is there any place in the State ... we've looked at this truck traffic and speed limit issue before ... is there any place in the State where the Department has enacted differential speed limits through a law or something like that? It seems like we looked at a special situation speed limit for some area up in the Flathead area or the Libby area this last session. Is that a possibility on this route?

A: (Jeff Ebert) You're a Legislator so that would be something that could be done through the legislative process. The only other process we have and the Transportation Commission has, is looking at speed zones through certain areas. I don't know of any locations statewide where the Transportation Commission has come in and looked at a speed zone on a 30-mile corridor. We usually look at smaller areas like approaching coming into towns. The speed limit that is set as you come into Boulder, the Transportation Commission sets speed zones and steps that down from 70 mph and gets you down to a more urban type roadway. But I don't know of any locations statewide where the Transportation Commission has come in and set a speed zone for an entire corridor. That is usually done by the Legislature.

Q: (Randy Kirk) I live 15 miles south of Boulder near the southern edge of the project. I manage a ranch for a non-resident. I would prefer keeping the highway on the existing route. Moving it across the river would disrupt and damage an otherwise peaceful rural area. The Lower Valley road, as it is, provides a safe place to move cattle and machinery safely and efficiently and it should be left alone. My main concern however, is that if we improve the highway at all, it is going to increase the volume of traffic especially the truck traffic. I've been harassed by trucks like some other people have mentioned on a regular basis. I would like us to consider making every effort to discourage or eliminate interstate truck traffic, which would reduce the need for such substantial and expensive improvements.

Q: (Sam Samson) I live on Browns Gulch Road. I represent myself and my wife Joanne. We feel very strongly about the issue at hand and feel also that the decisions made now will affect not only us but future generations as well. I've agreed with all the speakers so far. We have great interest and knowledge in this piece of highway and I've driven it since it was a dirt road in the 40's. We also attended hearings over 30 years ago in this very school when the roadway was the alternative route to the interstate. It was decided at that time that the major north south route should be and is located where the freeway exists today not down Hwy 69. For that reason and the following we respectfully ask you to focus your planning on the upgrade of the present day right-of-way, if any upgrade is necessary at all. As a Jefferson County Commissioner I work to encourage the building of a permanent manned GVW station in the lower valley. As a Commission, we also ask for a speed limit from the Elkhorn Bridge to Boulder and for better enforcement. Neither one nor two have been done.

Now as a citizen I'm again asking you to give number one and two serious consideration and we believe this would be a simple way to lessen risk and improve safety. Over ten years of discussions, hearings, and at great cost we recently completed the Red Bridge keeping its historic look and even protecting old Cottonwoods near its location. To build a new bridge in the same area would make absolutely no sense cost wise, aesthetically, or ecologically. Wildlife would be cut off from the river from both sides forcing constant road crossing pressure in the evening and early morning hours. This doesn't constitute a safety upgrade for wildlife or humans. Placing the highway on the north side would also add ten more approaches, many very poor site distances, and a high number of uses per day. This is a bus route and is also used by ranchers to herd cattle from one field to another and move them across Forest Service lands. The piece of county road is also used on a daily basis by bikers, runners, walkers, horseback riders, and I've personally put over 20,000 miles of running on this little stretch of road myself over the last 29 years. Each of these activities represents an enormous safety risk and greatly interrupts traffic flow. Virtually all the residents of the proposed route do not want this highway moved. Moving this road would pose a great hardship to the ranchers in this area and we are an agriculturally based community. Moving the highway would be going against the intent of the use of our valley. Changing this location violates number two and three guiding principles and goals the Jefferson County Growth Policy adopted in 2003 which state on page six number eleven: "protect and maintain Jefferson County's rural character." And number three: "preserve and enhance the rural friendly and independent lifestyle currently enjoyed by Jefferson County citizens."

In conclusion, we do agree the highway may need to be upgraded, however, it seems inconceivable that the cost of surveys, design works, miles of right-of-way, the cost of an EIS and EA, constructing two completely new bridges, overpasses, earthwork to bring grade through rolling hills, and signing and building numerous approaches could possibly even be near the cost of upgrading the existing roadbed. Also, if I were still a County Commissioner, there is no way that I would take that road over as an added cost to taxpayers. So thank you again for the chance to speak.

Com: (Darryl James) I want to interrupt just for a minute. Jeff said something like nobody has been out here staking right-of-way or anything. What you may see in the next two weeks or the next month and a half are people out laying targets for survey. Don't be alarmed at that, they are surveying this entire area for these two alternatives. We are not staking right-of-way, there are no alignments being mapped, it is purely survey for this project.

Q: (Nancy Owens) I live in Basin but we use Hwy 69 quite a bit. I agree with everything that people have said so far and I was glad to hear Tom talk about the rural character of the area. I've had a lot of experience doing EIS work myself and also evaluating it. I have a methodological suggestion for HKM, which is to take a really creative approach to the economic analysis because the kind of thing I foresee is that you've got this

alternative alignment that is going to disrupt farmers and ranchers. You've got wetlands on the existing alignment and because we know more about mitigating wetlands and the concrete could come up more expensive than the disruption to farmers and ranchers. In reality we are a rural community and if the farmers and ranchers get discouraged and sell out, then we are going to have subdivisions like crazy and we will lose the character and we will have a community that you are actually building the road you are talking about for. So there is a lot of economic sense in not building that kind of a road or you will get what you are building it for. That is what I have to say. Thank you.

Q: (Bud Smith) Local owner of a mechanic repair shop here in Boulder. I've lived in Boulder and the town of Elkhorn all my life. I'm here to represent Elkhorn Working Group that has submitted a letter in opposition to the rerouting of Hwy 69 to the east side of the Boulder River. The reasons are set forth in the letter sent May 18th to Mr. Ebert. Members of the Elkhorn Working Group are from communities surrounding the Elkhorn's. The group has 14 voting members that include ranchers, hunters, conservationists, recreation users, and community leaders such as County Commissioners and three non-voting members from the Fish Wildlife and Parks, Forest Service and BLM. It should be noted that these recommendations to agencies such as our May 18th letter are made through collaborative discussion and by consensus vote. Our recommendation has such a consensus vote reached after reviewing DOT's primary field report and discussing the issue at two of our meetings. I am submitting a copy of this letter as part of the record. Thank you for your consideration.

Also on a personal note, my home is in the town of Elkhorn and I travel this lower valley road summer and winter, day and night, and the amount of animals crossing this road is immense. To take this road from the speed limit which is 40 mph to a 70 mph road would be detrimental to both man and beast. Thank you for letting me comment on the issues.

Q: (Tresa Smith) I'm a rancher in the Boulder valley and a conservationist. I would like to state that I believe the plans for widening or a route change of the highway is an intrusion to a Montana way of life. I'm opposed to changing the route of Hwy 69. The Boulder Valley is a very narrow valley between two mountain ranges. A change in route would significantly impact the agriculture and wildlife environment. Not only would the lives of the family farmers who work in this area be economically altered, as Bud pointed out and others too, it would endanger the wildlife that use this river valley as a corridor and also the fish and water problems that could occur. It would ultimately affect not only just the people who live here but the people who play here – the many hunters and anglers who would lose a very valuable resource to them also. Many people here tonight have made comments and I really applaud the comments about the speed limit and the interstate being the route the fast trucks should use and not the route that the wildlife and the agricultural area use.

- Q: (Cathy Birtcher) My husband couldn't make it tonight but we are both opposed to the idea of moving state route 69 from its presently traveled way. There are some other options that I have heard considered that are less costly and they keep everybody living here happy. One very easy option would be to just lower the speed limit and enforce it. This option would: one reduce the truck traffic and entice the trucks to use I-15 that is designed for those; two reduce accidents along the road; three there would be no additional impacts to wetlands; four no additional safety issues; five reduce the cost of construction; six maintain the financial impact of the existing road such as the Boulder Hot Springs because putting in a new route is just going to devastate them. I realize right now the Sheriff's office has a very difficult time because it is very narrow. There are some things that haven't been considered – the new technology, the cameras that are out. It might be much less expensive to put those cameras up than to worry about widening the road and trying to enforce it the way that it is.
- Q: (John Heide) From the Heide Ranch. I have a question for Mr. Ebert. I'm opposed to the alternative route and if you haven't decided on anything, why have you sent letters to us asking for permission to survey?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) As Darryl indicated we are setting targets out there to do some survey work. Based on the public input we are receiving tonight, we are going to sit down and look at the decision to do that survey work over there. Short of seeing ... we are not going to do that, I would presupposing the environmental process and we could endanger the use of federal funds if I do that. So we are listening to what you are saying. If there is overwhelming support not to go over there, we may not do that.
- Q: (John Heide) The main question I have is about the letter that was sent to us pertaining to Hwy 69, there was no mention of the alternative route. That is my main concern.
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Are you on this route? (referring to graphic). Right on this end? Let me say that we are going to reconsider that.
- A: (Darryl James) Before Jeff commits us to that let me just explain one thing. I tried to allude to his earlier. Part of this process is just to walk us through all the other regulatory requirements. On this existing alignment, we are going to have substantial wetlands impacts. The Corp of Engineers requirements are that we fully assess any alternative that would avoid or minimize impacts. We may just have to set this up as a comparison for them to show that we looked at something but they are going to hang everybody at the Department of Transportation and this Boulder Valley if we went with that. So we at least have to explore that option and it may be in the end that there is no way we would have support to do that but we have to take that alternative to the Corp of Engineers and say that we have 20 acres of wetlands impacts with this alignment and we've got four on

this one, but if you build this people are going to come out of their shoes. So we are going to have to suck this up and find a way to mitigate those. Based on the Corp of Engineers requirements, it is not MDT, it not a NEPA requirement, it is a Corp of Engineers 404 Wetland and Dredge and Build Permit requirement that we have to look at other alternatives if they are available. So I can't let Jeff completely off the hook on this just yet.

Q: (Paul Smith) I'm a rancher down in the Boulder Valley. In fact one of the ancient ones you were talking about, I think it was one of my forefathers that had the bright idea of letting the road down there in the first place. They never should have done that but that was in 1964. My question is on the wetlands. I know you are talking about that, but what is the impact just along river where you are talking about reconstructing on the present route? Is it all the way along that route or is it just up by the river where it is impacting the wetlands?

A: (Darryl James) Most of your real high quality wetlands are in this immediate river corridor. You do have wetland complexes throughout the alignment.

Q: (Paul Smith) There is already a road through that in fact and isn't there more of an impact by going through virgin territory getting over to the east side and coming back over to Hwy 69? You are not just widening a road that is going through an existing route; you are creating a whole new route through wetlands to get over the Lower Valley Road.

A: (Darryl James) You are right.

Q: (Paul Smith) Impacting the river being a consideration or putting in two new bridges – twice the impact as staying on the west side of the river.

A: (Darryl James) You are absolutely correct and that is what we have to analyze in detail to find out how those balance out and weigh those impacts to find which is preferable.

Q: (Paul Smith) I would also emphasize that for 18 years I drove from the upper lower valley road down to the ranch. I would just go along with what Bud Smith was saying, there is a lot of wildlife – mule deer, whitetail deer, an occasional bear – that use that route to get down to the river and water. I think it would a lot more devastating impact on wildlife than keeping the route where it is.

The other thing I would bring up – if you did go through these ranches, there are four or five this direct route would devastate. We are probably talking about them selling out the adjacent land for subdivision. Maybe that sounds like good economics to have some subdivision, but from the standpoint of habitat fragmentation and wildlife devastation and devastation to the local rural community lifestyle, not only that but a local study done in

2000 showed that subdivisions for every dollar of taxes they generate demanded \$2.16 in services. Open space and the agriculture for every dollar received from them, the county only spent \$.29. So it would also be a big blow to the tax base to take out these ranches and put them into subdivisions.

Finally I would also recommend that you do a speed study to see if the trucks are really going 60 mph. If they are, then my old pickup needs to be traded in because it doesn't even get close to them.

My final point is that I think if you decide to keep that alternative route as part of your environmental document you might be making a serious mistake. Look at the criteria for an EIS, it would seem to me that you were pulling a trickery when you go over there because of the seven factors that are to be considered when deciding whether or not to do an EIS – about five of them are in the negative if you go over and use that as the proposed route.

Q: (Claudette Corrado) I object to the proposed highway. I'm concerned about school bus route. As I'm aware I don't think there are any in that area on old Hwy 69, but if you go on the orange line, there are more residents that have children in that area than on the yellow line. So they would have to be coming down to the highway to get on the school bus. Being a retired school bus driver I know the traffic does not stop when you put those red lights on because they just can't if they are doing 70 mph.

A: (Darryl James) Good point. Thank you.

Q: (Buster Bulloch) I'm in favor of a safe highway 69. There are some things we can't do anything about and that is a highway going down the Boulder Valley. It is a route, taxes are paid on it, and people are going to drive down it, and there is not a thing we can do about that. So I'm interested in a safe route and whatever is the safest route I think is what is in all our best interests.

Secondly, I love to drive down that Boulder Valley to my house through all those trees, and if they keep the alignment in the same place it is today, all those views are going away. If we take the alternative route there are some adverse effects, but there are some adverse affects on the other side, which we don't get to have that pretty view no more. So that is what I'm interested in.

Q: (David LeMieux) I have a couple of comments but first I have a couple of questions to clarify some things. First for Mr. Ebert. Would you say the construction challenges are the sub-grade, this rock wall, and wetlands?

A: (Jeff Ebert) The wetlands.

Q: (David LeMieux) Is that really ... now I'm just talking about the section of road just for the alternate route?

A: (Jeff Ebert) Wetlands and the Boulder River there.

Q: (David LeMieux) How significant are those construction challenges in your mind?

A: (Jeff Ebert) Without knowing the design, we just don't know yet. We've done a preliminary geological report through here, and I think it stated that there may be the possibility of some blasting that would have to occur but, again, that is still preliminary. Dealing through wetlands, we do it throughout the state. Contractors get creative and that is what they get paid the big bucks for. So I really can't comment because we just don't know those impacts yet.

Q: (David LeMieux) What is the plan for the existing Red and White Bridges?

A: (Jeff Ebert) The White Bridge is at the Elkhorn turnoff?

Q: (David LeMieux) If the alternate route is used what will those two bridges be used for? How will they be maintained or will it be removed? I don't mean to pin you down here; I'm just trying to get some information.

A: (Jeff Ebert) I think the Department would look fairly silly, if I can use that term, because we put some federal funds into re-doing the Red Bridge for us to come in and remove it. There has been some discussion on it and I haven't heard it here yet and maybe I shouldn't bring it up, but pedestrians, bike paths, and those types of things, we could get creative and possibly incorporate that into the design of those two and allow pedestrians and bikes to use that but we don't have a plan right now. We quite honestly don't have a plan for those.

Q: (David LeMieux) Just for my information could you locate the accident clusters you are talking about on the existing route between mile marker 31.5 and mile marker 36? That would be on the existing route all the way to the turnoff there.

A: (Jeff Ebert) I don't have that report in front of me but I think we do have a copy of it and I could kind of show it to you.

Q: (David LeMieux) Is that something MDT is concerned about in terms of correcting with upgrading that highway?

A: (Jeff Ebert) One of them is the straightaway, mile marker 26.4, which would be right about here (referring to graphic). That is on a straightaway and I'm guessing it is passing opportunities. That is one cluster. There was another one down on 32.6 probably right about here (referring to graphic), and one on 33.5 where it narrows right in this area in here (referring to graphic).

Q: (David LeMieux) So essentially those are in relatively straight corridors as it is.

A: (Jeff Ebert) That is the kind of ironic thing that we've found in this. That is probably why we couldn't come in and just put up curve signs and things like that to delineate it because there are no curves there.

Q: (David LeMieux) On the alternate route, we've got just a tape here and I know that you haven't done any surveys, but you talked about some icing and some shading areas, but you don't talk about on the other side what kind of grade you are going to have. You are probably looking at upwards of a 6% grade in several places. Another thing you are looking at in terms of highway safety is that you have two bridges and they are notorious for icing. Ok, so you've got a flat road on one side with no river and on the other side you've got grade and two bridges. I don't mean to put you on the spot here.

A: (Jeff Ebert) No. I'm not arguing with either. We want to hear these things, that is why we are here.

Q: (David LeMieux) Your turn Mr. James. I'm wondering if you could just define for us all what wetlands are? You call this a substantial wetlands area, can you define that and when you define that can you also define for us what an irrigation ditch is and how it influences and affects what you call wetlands?

A: (Darryl James) We've actually got an MDT biologist here and if my answer is insufficient, I might call on him. I'll try and educate you as much as I can. There are basically three different criteria for wetland delineation. It is based on hydrology, hydration, soil type, wildlife use and that kind of stuff. That basically identifies whether it is a wetland. MDT has a classification system of four different levels of quality in the functional class of wetland types. Again in this river valley and that river corridor, you are going to have higher quality wetlands just based on the use and the hydrology.

Now as far as irrigation ditches: there are new court rulings within the last year and a half or two years that have substantially changed what is considered a wetland under the jurisdiction of the Corp of Engineers. It is basically any surface water that's navigable are under their jurisdiction. So we've found that irrigation ditches can contribute and can in fact be wetlands under the jurisdiction of the Corp of Engineers as opposed to just a drainage or a borrow ditch along the side of the highway. So the definition of wetlands

under the jurisdiction of the Corp of Engineers has expanded greatly just in the last year and a half or so.

Q: (David LeMieux) So essentially you are not supposed to go into a wetland with an excavator? Is that correct?

A: (Darryl James) Absolutely.

Q: (David LeMieux) So then the ranchers that have owned and maintained these irrigation ditches which effectively run both sides of the highway through that whole corridor, they can no longer go in and clean out the irrigation ditches?

A: (Darryl James) I'm not even going to answer that question. What I can tell you is what MDT can't do is go in there with an excavator because, again, they are subject to the regulations of the Corp of Engineers. Actually Deb Wambaugh from MDT is the District Biologist and she would like to address that question.

A: (Deb Wambaugh) Just briefly without going into too much detail regarding irrigation ditches. Using an excavator in an irrigation ditch is not necessarily covered under the jurisdiction of the Corp of Engineers. It is actually fill and dredged material, the placement thereof, so what MDT is regulated for is the placement of fill into a wetland, which may be an irrigation ditch in this situation. There is also the grandfather clauses and there are all sorts of different regulations that apply to the maintenance of existing facilities with regard to potential impact to wetlands that may not necessarily apply to MDT, may apply to ranchers or vise-versa. So it is kind of two different things.

Q: (David LeMieux) So it kind of sounds like you all could save a lot of money if the farmers would just go in there and clean out the irrigation ditches before you get started fixing the highway. Another comment I have – first if we do look at that section here, at the Elkhorn turnoff on the map there with the arrow, then if you go to the alternate route and if you cross the valley floor, that distance is approximately .75 miles. Then if you come back to the Red Bridge, Bud Smith pointed this out a bit earlier, to the Red Bridge is 1.9 miles. If you look at the total area of these two sections combined and you subtract the .6 miles in the existing route where the highway approaches the rock face, there are actually two places where you have solid footing and good ground. If you look at the total area that would be obstructed by those two sections of roadway alone and you compare that to widening the existing route according to your own specs here, it is the same amount of area. So what I'm saying is the alternate route actually affects as much ground of lower valley floor ground as just widening the existing route. So I would appreciate it if when you do your study, to take a careful look at that.

Another thing I really want to point out here is that when we look at this alternate route, we talked about ranchers getting pretty concerned about making it and so forth. But if you look back twenty years Brown's Gulch was uninhabited and twenty years ago or maybe twenty-five years ago, there wasn't really anything up on the bench either. If you go back forty years, we weren't there. My point is that essentially what you are going to see over the coming years, fifty years or one hundred years from now, long-term planning, you are going to see more and more homes up on this upper bench. Part of the reason is you can't put home sites in the floodplain. How this affects the highway is directly related to safety. You have more and more people that are turning on and off of the highway in addition to ranchers using that route. You have variable speeds and so forth, and you really run into a lot more safety issues with this alternate route than using this existing route.

- Q: (Judy Johnson) I just wanted to make one real short comment. My husband and I live about 10 miles south of Boulder, and we use that road a lot. We travel that road a lot. I don't know if everybody remembers but it's been one or two years ago that the road was closed to truckers. They were doing some kind of construction down at Twin Bridges and it was just unbelievable how safe that road was. My husband and I were commenting about how nice it would be if there was no truck traffic on there. In the winter it is just treacherous with the trucks. So I do believe if that truck traffic was controlled, that would be the solution to this whole problem and I just really hope you will consider that. Thank you very much.
- Q: (Mike DuBois) I'm a Boulder resident. Back in the 90's you widened the road from Whitehall up to approximately the half way point and it made it a fairly nice road. Actually that road needs to be widened all the way from that point where that stopped all the way into Boulder. Why don't you waste your money doing that rather than worrying about this alternate route? I've seen a lot of accidents. You can see on down by the barn about 15 miles down there, a truck driver just drove off the road down there. The road has no edges to it whatsoever the whole length from there to Boulder.
- A: (Darryl James) I might just see if Jeff wanted to elaborate on some of the projects that might have occurred in the area over the past several years. Again, it basically comes down to funding. A lot of these roadways haven't been touched in 40-50 years. They aren't up to current standards. MDT is doing everything it can just to patch up and make basic improvements to these corridors. So you are seeing a project that was designed to be funded and built but they can't do an entire corridor all at once. That is what this project is about, it is trying to bring this up to the same standard as the lower portion.
- Q: (Sabrina Steketee) I grew up here in Boulder. That valley road, and you probably wish you wouldn't have used this word, but you said you were planning on "obliterating" it. That is right in the middle of almost 30 miles of what we call the back road. Not only, as

people have talked about is it important to us locally for our kids to ride their horses or their bikes or to just walk along, but as we talk about economic development in Boulder, that kind of a stretch of road is really becoming a rarity. As we seek to develop tourism in our area, access to a road like that can really draw people to our area for long bike trips, for family hikes, for day trips into the mountains around the area. I think to chop it up like that or to obliterate the middle of it is really short sighted for us in terms of economic development.

Q: (Tom Dawson) I own a substantial part of that cross over property on the south end of the proposed road. That would just ruin a beautiful meadow out through there, and it is semi wetland now. I have a question about ... on all your literature, your press releases and stuff; you said that the Elkhorn turnoff was 30.8, that is incorrect. It is almost 31.8 and it is a little misleading. I would like to ask you from Elkhorn down, what are your plans for fencing cattle, underpasses, taking the hill down there at the Elkhorn turnoff so that you have some safety and line of sight? What are you planning on doing for law enforcement for pullouts and things like that?

A: (Darryl James) Again let me stress that we are so far from having done any real design work, I can't even tell you anything about pullouts or fencing or anything like that. MDT, when they reconstruct or when they purchase new right-of-way, will install fence along the primary corridor like this and work with the landowner to find out what kind of fencing they want and that kind of thing. As far as enforcement, the wider shoulders are to provide enough area for enforcement for the officers to pull a vehicle over. But if there is a location that would warrant either a school bus turnout or a larger enforcement area, we can look at something like that. But again, those design details are several months away.

Q: (Tom Dawson) Just for the record, I adamantly oppose the alternate road on the lower valley road.

Q: (Charlie Sperry) I live out on Hwy 68 about nine miles out. First of all I would like to comment that I'm really glad that I don't have you guys job because you've got some tough decisions to make. I really don't have an opinion on the two choices as far as from Elkhorn on down, but I do sympathize with the landowners over there, and I think you've heard loud and clear their concerns. Mainly I want to ask a question. There has been a lot of talk about or suggestions about trying to reduce commercial truck traffic on the highway. Ms. Johnson correctly observed that when the trucks were not using the highway, it was a lot safer to drive. I can tell you I drive it twice a day five days a week all year around driving to Helena. It is scary with the truck traffic on there. So my questions is, I've never personally seen a highway where commercial truck traffic was not allowed, are there any examples of that? Is that a viable option, to eliminate commercial truck traffic on a highway like this? If it is not a viable option, are there

other alternatives to try to either minimize truck traffic or to reduce truck traffic speed? You've talked about a speed zone, etc. But I do think they've hit upon something that is worth looking into.

A: (Darryl James) I'll ask Jeff to elaborate on that but short of a legislative action, we can't take truck traffic completely off of a state primary route.

A: (Jeff Ebert) I don't mean to put Mr. Molter on the spot here, but I just want to point out that he does pay a lot of taxes for fueling – fuel taxes. Because of that we cannot ban trucks on this road. There is just no way we can. I don't think even the Legislature can do that because of the federal law that they do pay taxes and fuel excise taxes. There is no way ... as a part of this project the weigh station was mentioned, the temporary weigh station that is out there, ex-commissioner Samson did provide some impetus into getting that put in. We are going to re-do that facility with this project, and try to make that a little more user friendly. Right now the roadway is not really flat and it is tough for our folks to come in. We take care of weighing the trucks that come up and down the roads, but as far as law enforcement that is under the Montana Highway Patrol, which is a separate state agency. I know the recent Legislature did provide them the funding to hire 39 additional patrolmen statewide. I suspect that, based on the needs I'm hearing here tonight, that would be something that we could help bring about and at least talk to the Highway Patrol about trying to put more enforcement. One of the things we hear from the Highway Patrolmen that run this area is that there are no places to pull off a truck should they be speeding or even a local rancher. I know you guys don't speed either.

One thing we did point out here was that one of the things we are looking at, and these are kind of our minimum design standards that we have, right now you have pretty steep slopes coming off the edge of the asphalt, we would be putting in 6:1 slopes. This is where we get into the wetlands and we actually start filling in that material. That does give you the opportunity to pull over a truck or anybody that is speeding out there. It would help the law enforcement. I know that is one of the things they would point the finger back at us and say, "if you give us a place to pull these trucks over, we will try and do a better job of enforcement."

Q: (Ed McCauley) I live on the alternative route. I would just like to echo everyone else's comments so far. I'm opposed to the alternative route. I've got a number of questions to ask and part of it relates to Mr. Sperry. Isn't there a state law that says that if there is a safety issue on a highway of less than 50 miles that the Highway Commission can look at reducing speed limits and restrictions on trucks?"

A: (Jeff Ebert) I'm not aware of that so I don't know for sure. But it may be something we can look into on this highway, Ed?

- A: (Ed _____) This highway would qualify for that if it were just less than 50 miles. It probably could. I think it is only 37-39 miles or something like that.
- A: (Ed McCauley) What everybody here is talking about speed, you don't have very many truck accidents in the City of Boulder I assume? It is marked 25 and 35 mph. Personally speaking, I was a victim of a truck wreck here a couple of years ago where the trucker ... and they couldn't prove he was speaking but I know he was. They ticketed him \$70 for rear-ending me, and passing on a double solid line. It was a Canadian truck and all he cared about was getting to Utah. The State of Montana ticketed him \$70. I don't really think they did a very good job.
- Some of my other questions ... you are talking about a total rebuild from the Elkhorn turnoff up to mile marker 30 something? Yes that stretch (referring to graphic). So a total rebuild is that you are taking it right back down to the gravel or are you just filling in the ditches?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) No we would look at putting this type of prism in there, digging it down and building it back up.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) I don't know if you took time to drive down the highway today when it was raining but the south bound lane all the way down through that stretch through your whole thing, this portion up here is basically an old railroad bed and it is pretty solid. I guess I disagree with you taking it down and starting over.
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Let me preface it by saying we have not gotten that far along in the design. I'm just saying that under a typical project that is what we'd do. That may not be what we have to do here. We just don't know enough to really say.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) One of the other comments that was made by Mr. Bulloch was that all the trees are going to be gone down through that stretch if you stay on the existing route, so you really don't know if that is going to be the case yet or not?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) I can't say, no. We will try and minimize the impacts to the trees. I mean those trees are nice for protecting from the wind. I know that wind can be a big thing in blowing trucks off the road and all that kind of stuff. We would try and minimize the impacts to the trees.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) So you would try and stay within the 100-foot right-of-way as much as you could? You are talking about 6:1 slopes over here, and you told me before that was your general guidelines but they could change that a little bit if they had to.

- Q: (Jeff Ebert) That is correct. We could try and minimize this but then that calls for what is called a “design exception” and we have to get federal approval for that. But if there are areas where we need to mitigate for wetlands, we can put in guardrail which is actually an obstacle to hit too but versus going into a wetland. We will have to weigh that in the design specifics as we get further along.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) While we are on that, the lower portion of the road where you are hooking this up I believe the roadway is 25-foot pavement?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) That is correct.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) So you are going from a 34-foot up here to a 24-foot down there?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) When we are done the whole route would be 34 feet wide.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) On the portion that you are redoing?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Both portions.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) So you are going all the way to Cardwell?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) No. We are just going down here to 22 with this project.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) That is what I’m saying, where you are starting down there, from there to Cardwell right now it is presently only 24 feet.
- A: (Jeff Ebert) No that is a little wider.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) I don’t believe so.
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Well it is not 30 feet. On this end of it (referring to graphic)? But it has flatter slopes.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) I agree that it has flatter slopes, but I’m talking about the actual pavement part. I guess I would just as soon you stay with the same amount of pavement and minimize your impacts up here as far as how wide of road.
- A: (Jeff Ebert) Well, this width is kind of our minimum standard.
- Q: (Ed McCauley) I see. So when you redid the lower section of road ...?
- A: (Jeff Ebert) A different set of standards.

Q: (Ed McCauley) Why? It is the same road.

A: (Jeff Ebert) That other one was done about 10 years ago and our standards have changed based on federal requirements; AASHTO and those sorts of things.

Q: (Ed McCauley) I guess that is all the questions I have for right now. I reiterate my comment that I'm opposed to the alternative route. Just fill in the ditches, straighten a few curves. Use the excess money for the law enforcement.

That is the other thing I always get from the law enforcement – that if we pull over one truck then everybody else knows and they quit. Well why aren't you doing the job then? They take it like they only get one guy so why waste our time out there?

Q: (Ed Katzbeck) I live on Brown's Gulch. Before we leave tonight just out of curiosity I want you to take a vote tonight, just raise your hands: how many people oppose the road and how many people (inaudible)...? This way you can see the majority of the vote what we want.

A: (Darryl James) Can I guess first? I want a show of hands. Anybody who think this orange alignment is a preferred alignment at this point? Overwhelming! Ok. What I would like to do, we are kind of pushing up against what we had identified as the end of our open house period. Unless there are any other pressing questions or comments, I would like Jennifer and Sarah to kind of summarize what we've heard and make sure that we've got everything generally covered. We will review the tape later and make sure that we've got all these comments clearly in hand before we move forward in this process. Then I would like to invite you if you've got specific questions, to come up and review the aerials with our staff or with MDT staff. We will hang around for another half hour or so to answer any individual questions you have. Feel free if you didn't have a chance or you didn't feel like standing up and making a comment tonight with the microphone, to fill out either the little half sheet that we've provided and John's also has comment sheets up in the front table if you didn't get one on your way in. Feel free to send those in to Jeff Ebert in Butte or send them to my email address or however you want to do that. Thanks for all your comments. You can leave your comments with us tonight also.

Q: (Tom Butler) I'm from Jefferson City. I've lived in Jefferson County all my life and I'm also a Sergeant in the Highway Patrol for the last 13 years. The enforcement challenges you are speaking about tonight on Hwy 69 are very challenging. It is almost a catch 22, everybody wants the trucks worked in this particular section and the only way that is going to happen is if the road is widened out. Everybody needs to understand that. This particular section, particular the lower southern end of the valley, is nearly impossible to

work truck traffic on because there is absolutely nowhere to pull over. Also a cause of the rollover accidents that happen down there on a regular basis, one minor distraction and if you cross the line, you have no ability to make any corrections, you are upside down in the ditch. So everybody needs to keep in mind that for us to come down and effectively work it, we are going to need a wider section of highway.

One other point I would make, this being a rural area with truck traffic, just to give you an example from two weeks ago, I was on my way home and I stopped a truck down by Bob Simms house on the lower southern end of the valley. She was logged with violation of speeding. I ended up following her all the way to Whitehall and it took an extra hour and a half just to get the money that is required for an out-of-state truck driver. So those types of things crop up in this area. There are no ATM machines in the Boulder valley. When somebody comes down here to work, that all plays into what we do.

Mr. Ebert mentioned the extra staffing the Highway Patrol obtained in the last Legislative session. Just so everybody keeps in mind those officers will not hit the road until the summer of 2007. So if there is any extra enforcements as expected down here, it is not coming any time soon. The officer that is stationed in Boulder has been deployed to Iraq or activated in the National Guard three times in the last 18 months. So everybody needs to keep in mind that he has not been in the area to do anything simply due to the National Guard commitments that he is in.

One other quick comment, the truck traffic is up, the economy is increasing, truck traffic are growing on an average of three to five percent increase in truck traffic per year. Everything that comes to Montana with some minor exceptions of rail traffic, arrives on a truck. It is part of the economy and it is something that we are going to have effectively deal with. But banning trucks from the State of Montana or this particular area would be a detriment to the economy and would be impossible to do with the fuel taxes they pay on this highway.

Com: (Jennifer, HKM) Some quick housekeeping. It is very important that we have your mailing address or your email address. For future public meetings we will be notifying you either with a post card or an email. So please give us that information as you leave or on the sign in sheet. Sarah and I have compiled throughout the meeting on this board what we've heard from you verbally, what you've written down, we also have the official record that John has been keeping track of on the tape, so hopefully we've gotten it all. We want to make sure we don't miss anything.

The things we've heard over and over:

- Keep the truck traffic on the interstate.

- Speed enforcement.
- Throughout this we've also heard about the curve into Boulder being unsafe.
- Don't increase the speed on the existing route.
- Keep the rural character.
- Consider the agriculture impacts.
- Some potential creative solutions: Maybe new technology.
- Consider the cost, which is something we have to consider. We will be putting together spreadsheets that compare costs, wetlands impacts, everything that is affected in every alternative that we consider. So you will be able to see all of that like Darryl said.
- Look at the natural beauty, the resource impacts.
- We heard, through written comments, over and over again that there are many of you that would like us to go with the no-build alternative. We saw that in your written comments.
- Look at the wildlife impacts.
- The recreational use of the valley road: the pedestrians, the bicycles, the runners.
- Consider the school bus stops, how we are going to deal with some of those issues.
- The safest route. Safety is something that is of the utmost concern to all of you so that will be disclosed in the public environmental assessment also.
- More of a detail item: to look at the state law regarding the trucks and the truck traffic on this route and what options are available there.

Thank you again for all your input. It's important that we hear all of this.

CLOSING (Darryl James)

To give you an idea what the next step is. We will compile all of these comments and they will be made part of the Environmental Assessment. The next step: we start with some cultural resource surveys, biological resource surveys. You are going to see some folks out in the corridor this summer delineating wetlands, maybe digging some test pits, and all that kind of fun stuff along the alignment. Feel free to stop and talk to them, not on the shoulder because there isn't one, so be careful. You will see some activity in the corridor, feel free to give me a call or give Jeff a call. There are additional contacts on your little information sheet, feel free to contact anybody on that list. Anytime you have questions or comments throughout this process, that is why we are here, we need to hear from you. Again, thank you all very much for coming out, I appreciate your participation and we will see you, hopefully, within a few months to give you an update. Thank you.

APPENDIX B

**Written Comments
Received at the June 1, 2005
Public Meeting**

June 1, 2005

Highway 69 public hearing

Testimony of Terry Minow, 502 Lower Valley Road, Boulder, MT 59632, in opposition to re-routing of Highway 69

Good evening. My name is Terry Minow. My family ranches at 502 Lower Valley Road, which is 10 miles below the white bridge on the county road.

I support improving the safety of Highway 69, but I am opposed to re-routing of HWY 69, and I am opposed to rebuilding the highway in a way that will increase traffic and the speed of traffic on Highway 69.

My opposition is based on three major concerns.

First, I am concerned that neither one of these proposals will improve safety. The problem of safety on the highway is due to excessive speed, and to the number of trucks using the road. If you make the road wider and take out the curves, you will actually make it less safe. The traffic is already too fast—these proposed changes will speed it up that much more. Deer, elk, and other animals cross the back road every morning and night to water in the Boulder River. Moving the highway will also increase animal-vehicle wrecks.

Secondly, I am concerned about the impact on our rural lifestyle. Moving the highway will make it difficult for ranchers to move cows and equipment, which they do every day, up and down lower valley road, or the back road, as we call it. People in the area use the back road to bike, walk, run, ride horses, take a Sunday drive—and teach their kids how to drive. The school bus stops along the back road to pick up kids. Ranchers & neighbors also use the back road when the highway is icy, or when meeting a semi truck in a blinding blizzard is too much to handle.

Third, it is important to maintain the beauty of the existing highway, and I don't think that is considered in your proposals. Highway 69 is a gorgeous road, especially through the canyon. The trees and foliage in the fall are spectacular. I don't want to see the trees and vegetation stripped out of the area in order to make the road a big wide expanse of pavement.

I suggest the state consider the following ideas immediately, in the interest of improving safety and minimizing accidents:

Beef up enforcement of the speed limit on Highway 69. Ticket the truckers and other drivers who are speeding and passing on curves and over hills. Do whatever it takes to slow down traffic.

Ban semi trucks from using Highway 69. The interstate was built for high speed and commercial traffic. An exception should be made for local truck traffic.

Lower the speed limit for trucks. There is no way a truck can drive through the canyon at 60 miles an hour and be safe. Do a speed assessment.

The goal of improving the safety of HWY 69 is an admirable goal, one we support. However, I believe these proposals will have the unintended consequence of actually making HWY 69 less safe.

I ask you to refocus the construction projects on the goal of improving the safety of Highway 69 while maintaining the rural economy, lifestyle, and beauty of the Boulder Valley.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to comment on these proposals. Thank you for your time and attention.

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Comment Form

Project: BOULDER-SOUTH
Project Number: STPP 69-1(9)22
Control Number: CN2019

You are invited to make your comments on this form and leave it with the meeting officials or take it with you and mail it to Jeff Ebert, District Administrator, Montana Department of Transportation, PO Box 3068, Butte, MT 59702-3068 or E-mail the consultant djames@hkminc.com by July 15, 2005.

Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS: Megan Bullock
Box 364
Boulder, MT 59632

COMMENTS: With communities in Montana growing;
more people are on the states highways. The
safety levels on the current highway are compromised
in the winter months when snow & ice melt
slowly along the river & through the shaded areas.
Moving the road east of the river will allow
the sun full access to road surfaces and improve
melting. In addition, the farmers & ranchers who
are most affected have access also to Highway
69 so they will simply just need to change
their main entrance. The most logical &
economical solution is to use the alternate
route.

Boulder, Montana
June 1, 2005

TO: MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

RE: OBJECTIONS TO HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION ON EAST BOULDER
VALLEY ROAD

My name is Allen LeMieux. My wife and I live at 39 Hubbard Lane,
Boulder, Montana 59632. My telephone number is 406-225-3359.

Our home is adjacent to what is popularly known as "The Red Bridge" which lies athwart the Boulder River and, as I understand it, right next to the line of a new highway proposed to be built along the East Boulder Valley Road. For the past thirty years we have lived here in peace, beauty and tranquility, enjoying a great Montana life, raising nine children and now having twenty-four grandchildren. Not only is this place our chosen home but the place of their choosing for fishing, swimming, camping, picnicking, horseback riding, cattle raising and playing in the sandbox. One million dollars would not substitute for its value to us and our family in personal value alone. We hate to think that we could lose all of this – along with the aesthetic destruction of the entire area – for what? To avoid a bit of rock blasting along the existing highway? To avoid a wet-lands substitute land purchase of a few acres? To create two parallel highways? To destroy safe foot, horseback, cattle, bicycle travel? To create incessant noise pollution? To block or retard our easy access to our mountains, streams and woodlands? What kind of planning is this that would wreck so much to accomplish so little?

Can it seriously be taken that this proposed highway must be built as a public necessity? We doubt it very much. By the way the Boulder River lies upon a geologic fault line. Would that impact your decision to build two more bridges there?

The present road, for the most part, is built upon the old railroad bed that for years carried trains to Elkhorn. Surely, with improvements for safety, it could carry all of the traffic of Montana without faltering.

The Montana Department of Transportation news release in the Boulder Monitor says that usage on the present highway now runs from 1,500 to 1,600 vehicles daily. 17% of this travel is attributed to semi-truck hauling. We do have interstate highways nearby. But consider this: There are 1,440 minutes in a 24 hour day. According to your own figures, this means that on average a vehicle of some sort will fly past our home every 54 seconds! Further, of those vehicles, it

will be a semi-truck every 5½ minutes! What effect would you expect this to have on a peaceful, quiet, neighborhood? How much more traffic will follow in coming years?

The homes here are located where they are precisely, mainly at least, because of their remoteness from a busy, noisy, smelly, necessary but obnoxious, highway. I do not protest your proposal for myself alone. My neighbors must also continue to live in the atmosphere of peace and beauty they have worked most of their lives to own. What you propose is the destruction of us all!

Our message to you is clear enough; keep out!

Sincerely yours,


Allen Lemieux

TO: *cc: Darryl James, HKM*
CC: Montana Department of Transportation

FROM: David LeMieux *DL*
39 Hubbard Lane
Boulder, MT 59632

RE: Proposed Alternate Route for Highway 69, East of Boulder, MT

DATE: June 1, 2005

Recent news that the MDOT is considering rerouting Hwy 69, south of Boulder, MT, has perhaps all-of-the-local-residents concerned (myself included) about the impacts upon the valley that this action would cause. Although we acknowledge the wisdom of considering all options during early planning stages; we rural residents strongly request the MDOT rule-out this hwy rerouting option early in the planning process due numerous adverse impacts this rerouting option would have on the area.

MDOT has indicated that widening the existing route would cost \$16MM and using the alternate route would cost \$15MM. MDOT cites, construction of solid subgrade in the valley-floor land to contribute to the higher cost for widening the existing route. However, the most logical alternate route would be to bypass 5.5 miles of the existing route (from MP 31.5 to MP 36), but the alternate route would still cross ~1.9 miles of valley-floor land! Considering that the existing valley-floor highway is along solid ground for ~0.6 miles, the total area affected by this 1.9 miles of new roadway across valley-floor land is identical to the area affected by widening the existing route and of course saves construction of 2 bridges and ~3.5 miles of bench-land highway. This demonstrates that the proposed alternate route will actually cost *significantly* more than widening the existing route.

Note also that the existing route and alternate route lengths are both ~5.5 miles in length.

Additionally, the alternate route cause other impact that I hope encourage you to abandon rerouting plans for Hwy 69:

1. Number of egress points: The existing route is on the valley floor and due to flood-plane building regulations; this land cannot be used for future housing development. In contrast, the proposed alternate route crosses through land of at least three ranches and adjacent to numerous existing homes. Also, there are numerous landowners of properties near the alternate route. The past 20 years clearly shows this trend toward rural housing in this area and this suggests that in the future (20 to 50 years from now) even more homes will be built in this area. Therefore, a hwy reconstructed along the alternate route would have more rural traffic egress points—both upon construction and with increasing numbers in the future. This is a safety concern for both rural and non-rural traffic. To illustrate this safety concern, the proposed alternate route would contain numerous school bus stops—and these stops would

increase in number as more homes were built in the future, but in contrast, the existing route would always have very few school bus stops.

2. Business Impacts—Part 1: The existing hwy route passes directly in front of the historic Bolder Hot Springs Spa and Hotel. The alternate route would bypass the hotel, likely reducing business to this establishment. In addition the alternate route would impact ranch use on the existing Lower Valley and Hubbard Lane roads. Ranchers use these roads to periodically drive cattle and to haul hay on a daily basis. These ranchers would also lose valuable ranch land if the hwy was rerouted. Mixing ranch use with hwy travel is also another safety concern for Hwy 69 travel.
3. Business Impacts—Part 2: The alternate hwy route would likely be about 5.5 miles in length; of this, ~1.9 miles of the alternate hwy route would cross valley-floor land that is similar in nature to the land the existing hwy crosses. The MDOT indicates that the primary purpose of the alternate route is to prevent hwy construction over valley-floor land, but the area covered by the ~1.9 mile stretch is nearly equivalent in total area affected by widening the existing route. The proposed route would also travel over ~3.5 miles of the existing Lower Valley Road and much adjacent lands (to reduce grade elevation changes). Thus, the proposed alternate route will in fact use a significant amount of ranch land.
4. Recreational Use: The Lower Valley Road and the Hubbard Lane roads are used by rural residents, Boulder residents, and area residents for recreational uses such as walking, running, cycling and to access fishing and hunting areas. The proposed alternate hwy route would decrease, or eliminate, the recreational enjoyment value of these roads. This is yet another safety concern... to illustrate this safety concern, the proposed alternate route would pass near or over the existing historic Red Bridge—a location frequented by sportspersons who access the river for fishing and by unsupervised children who use the bridge for a bicycle parking lot, diving platform, sunbathing and general hang-out.
5. Rural Living Environment: Rural residents have moved to this area specifically for a rural lifestyle. However, the alternate route would effectively route hwy travel nearby and in some cases—immediately adjacent to—existing homes. According to MDOT data, this equates to an average of one vehicle passing by every 54 seconds and of these about every fifth vehicle is a semi-truck. This noise pollution would wreck the living environment these residents have spent their lives searching to find and working to purchase.
6. Infrastructure: The proposed alternate route requires building two new bridges to cross the Boulder River. In addition to building two new bridges, the existing NEW bridges (commonly known as the historic Red Bridge and the White Bridge) would likely be removed. The loss of this existing infrastructure seems 'unfortunate' in terms of long-term planning and particularly since rural residents spent a significant effort preserving the now historic Red Bridge.

7. Hwy Winter Road Conditions: The proposed alternate route will cross the river twice and have several uphill and downhill grades and likely more corners. This is more concern for safety because bridges are notorious for icing conditions and grades are more difficult for travelers to negotiate in winter conditions.
8. "Wetland" Considerations: Highway planners may be concerned that widening the existing Hwy 69 route, instead of using the alternate route, would affect so called wetlands. Along this section of roadway are age-old irrigation ditches that line the hwy on both sides. In many places, the ditches effectively form the borrow pits of the roadway, with the roadway slope comprising one side of the ditch. These irrigation ditches channel water to fields from spring to late fall. Local ranchers routinely clean and maintain these ditches using excavation equipment. *Is such a practice consistent with our current thoughts and management of what we all know are true wetlands?* Reasonably speaking these so called "wetlands" exist entirely due to irrigation practices. Widening the existing hwy route will only move the ditches outward to accommodate a widened roadway. This merely *relocates* rather than eliminates the so-called "wetlands."

The brief outline provided above is only a synopsis of impacts rerouting the Hwy 69 would have on the local area. Residents of the valley clearly do not want the proposed alternate route and request the MDOT to rule-out this option early in the planning process.

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Comment Form

Project: BOULDER-SOUTH
Project Number: STPP 69-1(9)22
Control Number: CN2019

You are invited to make your comments on this form and leave it with the meeting officials or take it with you and mail it to Jeff Ebert, District Administrator, Montana Department of Transportation, PO Box 3068, Butte, MT 59702-3068 or E-mail the consultant djames@hkminc.com by July 15, 2005.

Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS: Glenn Marx
Whitehall Ledger (weekly newspaper)
Box 1169 Whitehall
59759
whledger@a14-tch.com

COMMENTS: You're going to have to make the existing
road work. The Narayan route isn't going to
work and is not acceptable to nearly all or all
local residents.

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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NAME AND ADDRESS: Cheryl Martin

8 Hubbard Lane

Boulder, MT. 59632

COMMENTS: I am opposed to the construction of a new route. The alternate route would have huge impacts on the local ranchers, would impact wildlife that cross the county road. The alternate route would impact the same amount of wetlands as the existing alignment.

I suggest the best alternative is to keep the existing highway corridor, make spot fixes, and lower the speed limit in the corridor from the Elkhorn turnoff north to Boulder and enforce the lower speed limit. It seems there is technology available to minimize impacts to the Boulder River wetlands. Staff the weigh station and enforce the speed limit on the entire highway length.

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Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS: Tresa V. Smith, P.O. Box 27
Boulder, MD. 59632 - Boulder Valley Rancher
and Environmentalist email: tresa@tranch@aol.com

Plans for widening and road change are
an intrusion to a way of Montana life.

COMMENTS: I am opposed to changing the route of
Highway 69. The Boulder Valley is a narrow valley
between two mountain ranges. A change in route would
significantly impact the agricultural and wildlife
environment. Not only would the lives of the people who
have worked and lived in this area since their families arrived
as pioneers, be economically altered, it would also endanger
the wildlife which use this river valley as a corridor and
the fish and fowl which depend on the river and wetlands.
has, it would ultimately effect the many hunters and anglers
who would want to continue recreation and enjoyment in this
area.

Years ago a argument was made to make the interstate
go through this area. After significant discussion and
argument, it was decided to put this highway through
Idaho and Butte. Nonetheless, truckers continue to use 69
as a main route. The problem is their use of this
secondary highway as a main route. Yes the accident
rate may be high for trucks. But the volume of trucking
on such a secondary route is excessive. Speed limits -
high stations - should be considered as an
option - not just pandering to trucks and traffic.

June 1, 2005
Jeffery M. Ebert, Butte District Administrator
Butte Dist. Office
3751 Wynne Ave.
Butte, Mt 5702-3068

Dear Mr. Ebert,

This letter is in response to the recent proposal by the MDT to move Highway 69 to the Lower Valley Road.

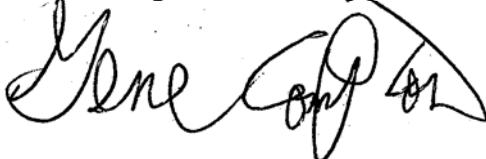
Our family ranch has been operating in the Boulder Valley for 15 years. We are opposed to rerouting the highway for the following reasons:

- *The current Lower Valley Road is the primary route for agricultural movement.* Our family and neighbors use the county road to drive cattle from pasture to pasture. In addition to people on horseback, we also frequently drive slow moving vehicles such as tractors, swathers and 4-wheelers. Changing the highway would make our daily operations extremely hazardous and dangerous for travelers on 69.
- *Negative Impact to Wildlife.* As members of the Block Management Program we enjoy seeing healthy game populations and successful hunters. The current low traffic road allows adequate wildlife movement from the foothills of the Elkhorn Mountains to the water of the Boulder River. A paved highway with stronger and higher fences would disrupt animal migration (causing herds to leave altogether) and genetically fragment animal populations (decrease strength and viability of herds).
- *Removal or alteration of three irrigation ditches.* If the highway is moved then the white bridge will need to be replaced and realigned which would take out two of our headgates and completely alter the flow of all three ditches. These ditches and headgates are not only built and maintained with our time and money, but are also our primary source for irrigating hay fields which feed the cows through the winter.
- *The removal of the Red Bridge.* The Red Bridge has been a long time favorite swim hole for our family and friends. We highly value this spot as one of the only recreation areas in the Valley.

Thank you for your time,

Compton Ranch

Gene Compton and family ~ 747 Lower Valley rd. Boulder Mt. 59632



Red Rock Valley Ranch, LLP
Griff Davidson
634 Basin Creek Rd.
Butte, Mt. 59701

Montana Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 201001
Helena, Mt. 59620-1001

To Whom it May Concern :

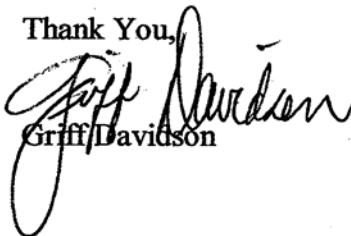
We presently own Section 18, T. 5N., R. 3W., located at the Elkhorn turnoff. If the decision is made to realign Hwy. 69 a crossed the Boulder River, our property will be greatly impacted.

The Montana Department of Transportation has defined Mt. Hwy. 69 as a rural minor arterial. In keeping with that definition the proper course of action to take would be none. Mt. Hwy. 69 is probably adequate for the purpose for which it was intended. Some say that safety is a concern and that the truck severity rate for the section of highway in question is 70 per cent greater than the state average for rural primary highways. It seems to me the most cost effective and simplest solution to this problem would be to reduce truck traffic on the highway. Posting lower speed limits, manning the temporary weigh station and aggressive enforcement will deter the high speed truck traffic and encourage those trucks to take Interstate 15.

If the decision is made to rebuild Hwy. 69, it makes sense to rebuild on the existing alignment. Fewer land owners and ranches will be impacted and the effect on property values will be less. The existing highway has fewer curves and far fewer hills than the alternative a crossed the Boulder River. Even if the alternative were constructed, I'm not sure the truckers would use it. They may continue to use the existing route because it is relatively straight and has little grade. Wetlands will be affected no matter which route is chosen, but much of what are considered wetlands on the existing highway are actually irrigation ditches. These ditches will have to be reconstructed near their present alignments as the highway is reconstructed. Hence, those "wetlands" will remain intact.

In my conversations with individuals at the Montana Department of Transportation concerning this issue I was led to believe that local public opinion was one of the major determining factors in making the decision on which alternative to use. If this is in fact the case, it seems that the plan for realignment a crossed the Boulder River is unacceptable.

Thank You,


Griff Davidson


Kimberly Davidson

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Comment Form

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Project Number: STPP 69-1(9)22
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Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS:

GRIFF DAVIDSON
Red Rock Valley Rock Valley
634 Basin Creek Rd.
Butte, MT 59701

COMMENTS:

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS:

Karen Davidson
Box 53 Basin Mt. 59631-0053
406-225-3554

COMMENTS:

Statement against rerouting Highway 69
Karen Davidson
Box 53
Basin, Mt. 931-0053
406-225-3554

My first option and the one that I would prefer is to do nothing to Highway 69 except lower the speed limit to 55 mph and enforce that and open the weigh station randomly 40 hours per week.

Next option would be to improve Highway 69 on the existing roadbed.

The idea of moving the highway across the river seems not to make any sense to me.

It would disturb an entirely new set of wet lands without mitigating the effects of the current highway on the wetlands it goes through since the current highway would remain as a frontage road.

It would divide a number of ranches even more by routing a major highway through them.

The number of access roads onto the highway would increase dramatically.

It would either cross or move five irrigation ditches.

It would directly impact more people than the existing road.

It would greatly impact wildlife and wildlife corridors.

There would probably be an increase in wildlife vehicle accidents.

It would require building two new bridges.

Currently the back road has a large number of school bus stops and the safety of those stops would be severely compromised.

The back road is often used recreationally for biking, horseback riding, sledding, drivers ed. and is an important route for moving cows and these activities would be impossible if this road becomes a major highway.

This option also does not take into account any of the current community opinions, the character of our community, or the fact that this part of the county is a rural agricultural area that would be divided and damaged by moving the highway.

Having two roads to maintain and patrol when neither is done effectively now seems like wishful thinking.

The current road is listed in "Montana Outdoors" as one of the nicest drives in Montana. Why ruin a good thing when it can be improved with little or no expense or work.

If safety is truly a concern the speed limit should be lowered and enforced.

This is a rural road and should be considered as such when thinking about what kind of traffic is being planned for and who should be using it.

Please consider these thoughts when you are planning the future of this road.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Karen Davidson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Karen Davidson
Box 53
Basin, Mt 59631-0053

TO: Montana Department of Transportation

FROM: Bruce Dyer, 1184 Lower Valley Road

RE: Plan to re-route Highway 69

DATE: June 1, 2005

I have some serious concerns about your proposal to move Highway 69 onto Lower Valley Road. Though I am sure that your engineers initially felt that this was a logical solution to the problems with the existing highway, I do not feel that the full impact of this decision and all of the problems which such a change would cause were fully thought out.

First, take a look at the environmental factors. Your report states that widening the existing highway will encroach on wetlands. However, many of these so called wetlands are merely irrigation ditches. To route the highway to the other side of the valley will require crossing the Boulder river twice, which will definitely mean you will be building a new road through existing wetlands. There is simply no way to cross the river bottom without doing so. Constructing two entirely new bridges will certainly have an impact on wetlands. Leaving the road where it is will ultimately disturb the wetlands less than a move to the other side.

Also to be taken into consideration with the environment is the impact on wildlife. The gulches to the north of the river are full of elk, deer, and moose, all of which have established trails leading across Lower Valley Road to the river. Placing a highway on the north side will greatly increase the conflict between vehicles and wildlife. Along this stretch of Lower Valley Road you will also find nesting areas for bald eagles and sandhill cranes.

When one discusses environment, they must also take into consideration the humans which will be affected by any changes. There are at least 15 residences which are accessed by this portion of Lower Valley Road. These people have chosen to live in a rural area either because their means of making a living is dependent upon it, or because they prefer a rural lifestyle. Placing a busy highway on the north side of the river would completely destroy the peace, security, and privacy the residents currently enjoy.

Next, I would like to address safety. Your report sites accident statistics which are above normal for 2-lane highways in Montana. Looking at these accidents, I am sure you will find they are either caused by excessive speed or alcohol, or a combination of the two. Widening and straightening a road will not cause drivers to slow down, nor will it cause them to stop drinking. Adequate enforcement of speed limits and discouraging truck traffic will effectively lower the accident rate.

Moving the highway onto Lower Valley Road will actually create additional safety problems. Due to the far greater number of homes along the back road, there are a number of school bus stops. The greatest enemy of school busses and children are trucks traveling at high speeds. The back road is also used as a route for ranchers to move cattle and agricultural equipment. Because ranchers have the use of Lower Valley Road, they can avoid using Highway 69 for such purposes. Lower Valley Road is also used for recreational purposes. People take relaxing walks; children ride their bicycles; residents take horseback rides; kids sled on it in the winter; and many a Boulder youth has taken their first driving lesson on this road. Construction of a busy highway, with fast moving vehicles and semi-trucks, will simply make this route unsuitable and very dangerous for all of these uses.

One must also consider the terrain over which these roads were built. Though there are some sharp curves along this stretch of Highway 69, it is essentially flat. Lower Valley Road, on the other hand, is both curvy and hilly. There are a large number of approaches along Lower Valley, many of them on curves and hills. Vehicles moving at highway speeds would make access extremely hazardous.

Next, I will address some economic concerns. Your report suggests that the base under the existing highway is not suitable for its use. However, it has held up to vehicle traffic for over 50 years without any significant maintenance. Additionally, it held up to freight train traffic for many years prior to that, as Highway 69 was in fact built upon an old railroad bed. The massive effort it would take to cross the river bottom twice and completely construct a new highway along the north side of the river, as well as construct two new bridges, would certainly require significantly more money than simply widening the existing roadway.

There will also be a major economic impact on the ranchers who depend on Lower Valley Road to efficiently and safely run their operations. New construction would destroy many acres of hay and grazing land. Further, the value of the homes along this road would no doubt be substantially affected by an intrusive state highway.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of the Red Bridge. This historic structure over the Boulder river was recently refurbished at a significant expenses to taxpayers. It would appear that your proposed route for the new highway will go right through this area. Do you intend to remove this historic and beloved symbol, or merely bypass it? Either way, it would be a huge waste of the fortune recently spent on the preservation of this bridge. I believe the media would have a field day with such a blatant waste of the taxpayer's money.

I hope the State realizes that the problems associated with moving Highway 69 far outweigh any potential benefits. Your careful consideration of this matter will be much appreciated. If you would like to further discuss any of these issues, please feel free to contact me at 406-225-3590.

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Comment Form

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Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS:

Brud Smith Box 565
Boulder, MT 59632 Ph 225-4397

COMMENTS:

See attached - Oppose Alternative
on east side of river

June 1, 2009

My name is Ned Smith. I am a fourth generation rancher living on the Lower Boulder Valley Road. Although the proposed alternative east of the river would not go through our property, I believe it would be very detrimental to ranching, wildlife and our rural community's lifestyles and interests. I am opposed to the alternative route east of the river.

From 1989 until 2000 I daily drove the Lower Valley Road from east of Boulder down to the ranch, 10 miles out. A highway along that route down to the Elkhorn bridge would wreck havoc with whitetail and mule deer and elk and the occasional bear and moose that come down from the Elkhorns to get to water and the river bottom. There isn't near the problem with Bull Mountain and wildlife on present highway 69 that there would be with rerouting. Rerouting would only cut off important wildlife corridors.

A highway on the east side would also make it very difficult in moving cattle in the spring and fall to BLM & Forest permits many of which come home on their own in the fall along the Lower Valley Road.

The rancher with the highway right through them would be devastated and probably all the adjoining property which means subdivisions, habitat fragmentation and loss of an important tax base. A local study in 2000 showed that for every dollar Jefferson County received in taxes from subdivisions it cost the County \$2.16 for local services. For open spaces and agriculture every dollar received the County spent 29¢ for service.

If safety is the driving issue for the project then something should be done about the high speed

read Smith page 140

of the reroute that use the route. Part local rancher complaints have not been addressed. Widening the road might help pull over violators but building a 55 mph designed hilly highway with an unenforced 60 mph truck 70 mph cars, will only add to the safety problem not detract. I would recommend a speed study be done of the traffic on Highway 69. And why can't something be done short of legislation to get interstate truck traffic to use the interstate. If the truck accident rate is as bad as your study shows then how is the trucking industry economically saving by speeding down Highway 69 and getting in wrecks. Maybe some safety projects in the July '9 DOT report should be considered first.

Now if the primary consideration is avoidance of environmental wetlands in reconstruction of the present route of 4.3 miles from 26.2 ft to 32 ft how do you justify opening up a brand new right of way through the same type of wetland to get to the Lower Valley Road and then back to Highway 69 at the Elkhorn bridge (Plus crossing the Boulder River twice) It would appear that there would be more environmental impact on opening new wetlands ~~than~~ in the alternative than simply widening in the present route with a highway already through it.

In conclusion I believe that consideration of the even factors that determine whether there will not be significant impact on the environment will indeed trigger a necessity for an EIS not an EA if the alternative site is considered as an option in the upcoming proposed

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Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS: Michael A. Hertweck
3361 Hwy 69
Boulder Mt. 59632

COMMENTS: I myself would prefer the alternative of
a no build option, Three Things That I feel
would make the accident clusters safer would be:
① enforce speed limit
② put up guard rails where needed
③ mark corners with signs + flashing
lights where needed

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS:

S. Mark Steketer
Box 566
Boulder MT 59632

COMMENTS:

I am opposed to the alternative re-route for the following reasons

1. Impact on ranches
2. Impact on residents
3. Impact on wildlife
4. Without enforcement improved the road will be more dangerous for us less dangerous for truckers.

S. Mark Steketer

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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NAME AND ADDRESS:

Sabrina Steketee
Box 566
Boulder, MT

COMMENTS:

I am vehemently opposed to the alternate route. There is no advantage to the environment - there is detriment to our current and future economy and our way of life. Neither alternative addresses safety and enforcement concerns.

1184 Lower Valley Rd.
Boulder, MT. 59632
406-225-3592

6-1-05

To Whom It May Concern:

We are apposed to the idea of moving St. Rt. 69 from its presently traveled way.

There are other options that have not been considered, are less costly and keep those of us living here happy.

A very cost effective option would be to LOWER the speed limit & ENFORCE it.

This option would:

- 1) Reduce truck traffic & entice trucks to use Rt. 15 that is designed for them.
- 2) Reduce accidents along the road.
- 3) No additional impact to wetlands.
- 4) No additional safety issues. (school bus)
- 5) Reduce costs of "construction."
- 6) Maintain the financial impact of the existing road. (Hot Springs & businesses proposing to go in south of Boulder.)

I realize the sheriff's department is unable to enforce a speed limit; however, there are the new technology (cameras) that can enforce the reduced speed limit & cost much less than \$16 to \$17 million dollars.

Cathy Birtcher
Jon R. Birtcher

e-mail jbirtcher@gwest.net

THE ELKHORN WORKING GROUP

C/O HELENA AREA RESOURCE OFFICE 930 CUSTER AVE. WEST
HELENA, MT 59620

(406) 495-3260

June 1, 2005 Public Meeting Highway 69

I am Bud Smith, local owner of a mechanic repair shop here in Boulder. I have lived in Boulder and Elkhorn all of my life.

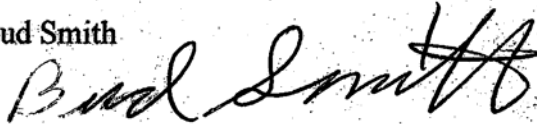
I am representing the Elkhorn Working Group that has submitted a letter in opposition to the rerouting of Highway 69 to the east side of the Boulder River. The reasons are set forth in that letter sent May 18 of this year to Mr. Ebert.

Members of the Elkhorn Working Group are from the communities surrounding the Elkhorns. The group has fourteen voting members that includes ranchers, hunters, conservationists, recreational users, and community leaders such as a county commissioner and three more non-voting members from the FW&P, Forest Service, and BLM. It should be noted that recommendations to agencies such as in our May 18 letter are made through collaborative discussions and by consensus vote.

Our recommendation had such a consensus vote reached after reviewing DOT's Preliminary Field Report and discussing the issue at two of our meetings.

I am submitting a copy of the letter as part of the record. Thank you for your consideration.

Bud Smith



Member Elkhorn Working Group

Jefferery M. Ebert, P.E., Butte District Administrator
Butte District Office
3751 Wynne Avenue
PO Box 36
Butte, MT 5702-3068

Dear Mr. Ebert:

May 18, 2005

This letter is in response to the recent proposal by the Montana Department of Transportation to change Highway 69 south of Boulder to the opposite side of the Boulder River along what is presently Lower Valley Road. These are comments by the Elkhorn Working Group after review of the Preliminary Field Report prepared by the Department of Transportation and approved by Mr. Paul Perry on August 5th, 2004.

The Elkhorn Working Group (EWG) opposes the rerouting of Highway 69 along the course of the current Lower Valley Road for the following reasons:

***A direct increase to wildlife mortality.** Every day hundreds of different animal species cross the current low traffic county road to get from the feeding grounds in the foothills to their main water source, the Boulder River. The proposed highway would increase the occurrence of wildlife/ vehicular collisions.

*** A direct increase in livestock/vehicular interactions.** Domestic livestock reside on both sides of the Lower Valley Road. When large domestic animals are hit by vehicles, lawsuits often follow. A long drawn out lawsuit can be economically devastating for ranchers. This problem would increase with the highway change as more livestock reside along the Lower Valley Road than the present Highway 69 route.

***Increased automobile accidents resulting in injuries and deaths.** The two previous bullets demonstrate the increased number of domestic animals and wildlife colliding with vehicles. Therefore, traffic injuries and fatalities will increase for all travelers on Highway 69 with the proposed highway change.

The direct affects mentioned can ultimately lead to several harmful *indirect* affects including:

The loss of ranches to subdivisions. Ranches that are not economically viable have promoted the growth of subdivisions. Subdivisions in turn cause habitat fragmentation and loss of animal populations.

The Elkhorn Working Group was created several years ago to provide cooperation and coordination between, agencies, landowners and interested parties involved in the Elkhorn Mountains. The Elkhorn Working Group acknowledges that decisions regarding public lands often impact private landowners and that good stewardship of the land serves both private and public interest, benefiting both wildlife and livestock. It is in the interest of the State of Montana to preserve and maintain successful ranching operations that ultimately support local economies. The EWG is in opposition to the proposed highway project because it would drastically alter and negatively affect wildlife and ranching operations.

We urge the Montana Department of Transportation to abandon further consideration of the proposed alternative of Highway 69.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Elkhorn Working Group

Tom William

Brad Smith

Tonia E. Lythgoe

Sam Samson

C H Rydzica

Danell Baum

David Brown

Dennis Engstrom

Jim Sorenson

David R. Baum

Paul H. Smith

Leah Compton

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Comment Form

Project: BOULDER-SOUTH
Project Number: STPP 69-1(9)22
Control Number: CN2019

You are invited to make your comments on this form and leave it with the meeting officials or take it with you and mail it to Jeff Ebert, District Administrator, Montana Department of Transportation, PO Box 3068, Butte, MT 59702-3068 or E-mail the consultant djames@hkminc.com by July 15, 2005.

Please indicate your name, address and affiliation (if any) below. Thank you for your interest and comments on this project. Feel free to use the back and/or additional sheets of paper if necessary.

NAME AND ADDRESS:

Bud Smith
Box 29 Boulder MT, 59632

COMMENTS:

ON A personal note - My home is in the town of Elkhorn AND I drive this road (Hower Valley) summer - winter - day AND night. The amount of animals crossing this road is immense, to make a road so as the speed limit would be increased from present 40 mph to 70 mph would be detrimental to man AND beast. devastating. Thanks for letting me address this issue.

Bud Smith

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

get the trucks off of Highway 69
enforce a 50 mph speed limit for
this project area

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

man the weigh station full-time
we won't let you destroy the Old
Red Bridge!

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

bike paths
pedestrian walkways
no trucks



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Cultural & social impact to the Valley
Environmental issues

Safety when traffic increases (esp truck traffic)

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Move trucks to I-15 would be
the preferred alt (No Build)

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Reduce speed limit



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- 1 - alternate route
- 2 - alternate route
- 3 - alternate route

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

I live here - I know every curve and hill of the property you are considering destroying.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Don't spend 17 million to fix a #2 problem.
Build some pullouts & use the rest to staff patrolmen - you'd have enough to keep a patrolman on the road for 100 years!



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

I am concerned if we use alternate route we will have 2 Hi ways many Trucks & Tourists will use existing 69 making 2 Dangerous intersections

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Impact of Proposed Alternate 69 on Farm Community! Wildlife
Safety - Will the state do anything to slow down trucks on Hwy 6

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

I drive 69 often. It's a beautiful road - Safety issues
may arise when I drive this road are almost always
because of semi trucks or wildlife on road

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Slow down the semi's.
Enforce speed limits

Protect wildlife by creating wildlife corridors or underpasses.



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

1. SAFETY
2. Rancher concerns
3. TRUCK control

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

NO

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

1. Curves
2. Road width
3. Truck control



Boulder South

June 1, 2005

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Safety, Protection of wetlands
Preservation of Natural beauty

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Local business, retail & agricultural
This area is becoming more dependent on tourism and
Tourism is impacted by the existence of natural beauty
and the preservation of rural esthetic.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

greater enforcement of speed limits,

HKM
ENGINEERING

Boulder South

June 1, 2005

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- 1) Proposed re-route location, safety, loss of infrastructure
- 2) Truck speed & increased traffic due to improved road
- 3)

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

- 1) Fault line on Boulder River
- 2) Bald Eagle habitat obstruction where alt. route crosses
- 3) Recreational use of Valley road.
- 4) Noise pollution (traffic)
- 5) Loss of scenic Hwy (existing route)

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

- 1) Photo-radar systems to reduce speed.
- 2) Relocate the scale
- 3) Design Hwy and Trunkline

HKM
ENGINEERING

Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Disturbing wetlands, & the expense of "mitigation" compared to signage, patrolling, diverting trucks to I-15
Disruption of agriculture & neighbor community @ alt. rt —
This is hard to "quantify" because of how economic measures over

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

No build alternative w/ ways to improve safety w/o change.

HCM
ENGINEERING

things. For ex, from a "money" view, the "cost" of compensating farmers/ranchers could be relatively cheap (compared to wetlands mitigation, for ex). However, farming/ranching is marginal economically & ranchers could get discouraged & sell out & then we'd have many subdivisions & pop. growth — i.e. a community that needs the road you're building. Such a change is "calculated economically" as a plus. Yet it's a horror story for current residents & historical values.

Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- ① Alternate route coming much closer to my home. I am opposed.
- ② Raining a major game crossing & feeding ground.
- ③ Cost, paying with my tax dollars.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

The proposed new route will impact a major game crossing to bottom lands, that may qualify as wetlands, and cut those lands. The major impact will be to game feeding & crossing.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Reduce speed limit & enforce with cameras.



Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Farm land between 22 + 23 mm

High-way crossing Carey Ditch between 25 + 26 mm

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Irrigation Ditch and center pivot next to road

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- Agricultural impact
- Safety concerns - don't want high speed traffic
- Maintaining rural character, including scenic areas

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

- * Ban trucks
- Lower speed limit
- Enforce speed limit



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

1. GETTING THE TRUCKS BACK ON TO INTERSTATE 15, WHERE THEY BELONG!

2. GETTING TRUCKS OFF OF HIGHWAY 69

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

YES - I HAVE LIVED IN THIS AREA ALL OF MY LIFE

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

BIKE PATHS + PEDESTRIAN WALKWAYS
ALONG EXISTING ROADS - THAT'S IT -
NO RE ROUTING ON TO BEACH



ON HIGHWAY 69 =
3. ENFORCE THE
GODDAMNED
SPEED
LIMIT
24/7
4. MOVE
THE
MERCH
STATES
24/7

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Ranch activity, Hunters, wildlife

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

I am in favor of No Build Option



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- ① Improvement of Hwy 69
- ② Possible relocation of road
- ③ Interest in conserving wetlands

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

wetlands & waters along current route would be better protected by relocating road to drylands east of river.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

None known



Boulder South

June 1, 2005

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- 1- COST OF Relocation
- 2- FACT - Hwy 69 Old Road To still be maintained
- 3- IMPACT TO Landowners on Relocation

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

No

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder South

June 1, 2005

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

1. Agriculture - Economic Survival of Farm Families
2. ENVIRONMENTAL - Endangering Wildlife, Fowl, Fish, Water Quality
3. Why should they be negatively impacted to encourage traffic and international trucking.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Area serves as an example of what makes Montana - Montana - Farm families wildlife - why should a major highway intrude on this - High speed trucks should use the high speed inter-state.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

trucks rounded on the Highway to traffic
at excessive speed.
Move cattle, etc. disrupt rancher & others, recreation, wildlife

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

HKM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Landowner

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

river crossing

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

HKM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- Bisecting Ranchlands, & disrupting agricultural movement on county road.
- Ruining the Red Bridge swimming & recreation area.
- Spread of weeds from highway traffic to nearby range-land.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Lifelong resident of the Boulder Valley.
Degree in Range Management.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Permanent weigh station



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- Impact on fellow ranches (which will be detrimental)
- Increased traffic-negative-which will result
- Difficulties resulting for all valley residents

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Lifelong resident of the Boulder Valley

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Lower speed limit
weigh station that's OPEN



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- 1) The Alternative route being discussed, happens to run through our property.
- 2) we travel the "would be alternative" route every day with slow moving vehicles from the elk Horn bridge to the Red Bridge.
- 3) LAND taken away from ranchers.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

- Many agricultural fields will be divided.
wild life habitat being taken away.
Historical sites being removed.
You would also have more cattle on the Alternative route slowing down traffic.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

- widening existing route or leaving it the same way.

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

- Lots of Ranches cut in Half and
Loss of Land

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

- Guard rails, signs on corners, enforce speed limit

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Changing the Present Road
Constructing a new Route
Safety on Hwy 69

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

New Road would be in more of an impact zone
pertaining to animals

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Control the Traffic on 69



Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

The opposition of the alternative highway
MST ~~and~~ views on road options (sincerity?)
Community impact

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Yes. The resource would be hay and pasture ground completely split up by the proposed alternative highway. It would eliminate water sources for a majority of pasture ground.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

The alternative route is also in floodplain area.



Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Land owner for 3+ miles of 68
own parcel @ Elkhorn turn off major impact on ranching business
Safety issues related to improved roadway

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Ranch access

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Fences
underpasses for livestock



Boulder South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- The alternate route through the valley which I oppose
- The potential of having 2 highways through this valley.
- Concern for ranchers & their life style

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

- Boulder Hot Springs would no longer be ^{right off} a secondary road - this would negatively affect business.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

- Truck traffic & monitoring of speed, weight, etc.
- bike & pedestrian paths
- provide safety for wildlife



Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

social
wildlife impacts
personal

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Yes, I live near the red bridge & drive Hwy 69 4 days/week to whitetail.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

lower the speed limit from Elkhorn turnoff to Boulder. Utilize technology to minimize impacts to wetlands & maintain the existing corridor. Maintain the beauty of the current highway.

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Building a new road when the existing road is more than adequate. Concern for the effects a new road would have on the aesthetic experience of driving on Highway 69 & on the property owners.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

Property values on some personal property.
Splitting ranch property.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

Enact & enforce a 55 mph speed limit & open the weigh station

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

- Impact on property I own Along Alternative Route.
- Decrease in my property value Along Alternative Route.
- Impact on rural lifestyle of the Boulder Valley as more High Speed Traffic uses the new road.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

- Because I own land along the Alternative Route the income I generate off that property will be affected if that Route is chosen.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

- lower Speed limits
- weigh station
- greater enforcement of weight limits And Speed limits.

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder-South

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

CONCERN THAT road improvement will ~~attract~~ increased Traffic. Especially large Trucks
CONCERN about impact of new road ~~on~~ right-of-way on existing land owners.

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

The single biggest improvement would be to lower the Speed limit to 55 and then enforce it.

HCM
ENGINEERING

Boulder South

Public Survey

Date: 1/1/2005

1. What top three issues spurred your interest in this meeting?

Public Safety
wildlife
Public Welfare

2. Do you have personal knowledge about resources that may be impacted by this project? Please describe.

3. Are there specific improvements to transportation facilities in the corridor that should be considered?

HCM
ENGINEERING

APPENDIX C

**Letters from
Jefferson County Commission and
Jefferson County Planning Board**



Jefferson County Commission

Courthouse, P.O. Box H
Boulder, Montana 59632-0249
Telephone 406-225-4025
Fax 406-225-4148

Tom Lythgoe, Chair Chuck Notbohm, Commissioner Ken Weber, Commissioner

RECEIVED

July 6, 2005

JUL - 7 2005

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
BUTTE, MONTANA 59701

Jeff Ebert, District Administrator
Montana Department of Transportation
PO Box 3068
Butte, MT 59701

Dear Jeff,

The Jefferson County Commission would like to comment on the upcoming Highway 69 project. The scoping meeting held in Boulder on June 1st was very informative, and we would like to thank the Transportation Department for the time and answers given to our constituents. That public meeting was very informative not only from the Transportation Department stand point, but also from the area resident's view point. This Commission has some concerns over the fact that the Transportation Department might propose asking the county to take over the maintenance of Highway 69 between the Red Bridge and the Elkhorn turn off. This being a paved road with definite safety and quality concerns makes the Commission leary of taking over the maintenance of this section of road. We see a need to address the needs of this highway, and applaud the Transportation Department's efforts to address these concerns, especially from a safety perspective.

Please let the record show that due to our resident's concerns, the safety concerns, and the budget concerns, the Jefferson County Commission would ask the Montana Department of Transportation to rebuild Highway 69 in the present location, and not move it to the proposed alternative location.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments on this project.

Sincerely,

Tomas E. Lythgoe
Tomas E. Lythgoe, Chair
Jefferson County Board of Commissioners

Chuck Notbohm
Chuck Notbohm

Ken Weber
Ken Weber

COM/ba

BUTTE DISTRICT	
1	DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR
2	DEPT. CONST. SUPER
3	ASST. DIST. CONST. SUPER
4	FIELD PROJ. MGRS
5	DATA OFFICER
6	ENGR. DESK/SUPER
7	ENGR.
8	DESIGN
9	QA
10	WATER
11	OUTSIDE
12	DIST. PROJ. ENGR.
13	PERSONNEL
14	DIST. PROJ. SUPER
15	CHIEF OF MOUNTAIN
16	MAINT. SUPER. OF RD. H.
17	ENGR. SUPER. OF RD. H.
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RECEIVEDJUL 15 2005
DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
BUTTE, MONTANA 59701**JEFFERSON COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
COURTHOUSE, P.O. BOX H
BOULDER, MONTANA 59632**

July 14, 2005

Jeff Ebert, District Engineer
Montana Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 3068
Butte, MT 59702-3068

Dear Mr. Ebert:

The Jefferson County Planning Board has reviewed your tentative proposal concerning upgrading Highway 69 south of Boulder to approximately mile post 22.

We realize that plans are in the beginning stage and that a full range of alternatives has not been developed. However, one of the tentative alternatives proposes to construct a portion of the highway east of the Boulder River to approximately the Elkhorn turn off.

The Jefferson County Planning Board is opposed to the proposal as we believe it would violate a number of our goals and objectives set forth in Jefferson County's Growth Policy, adopted June 18, 2003.

Specifically, the Right to Farm and Ranch Policy, Resolution 31-2002, is intended in part to:

- Conserve, enhance, and encourage ranch, farming and all manner of agriculture activities and operations within and throughout Jefferson County where appropriate.
- Minimize potential conflicts between agriculture and non-agricultural uses of the land in Jefferson County (Growth Policy, Pg. 37).

We believe adding a new section of highway as proposed, maintain the old highway as a county road and obliterating the present dirt county road east of the river would be very detrimental to ranching activities in the Boulder Valley and would ultimately result in loss of agricultural land and congest subdivisions in the area harmful to agriculture, wildlife, and the rural character of the area.

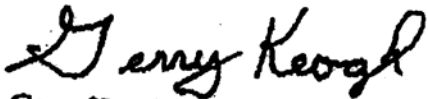
Such construction in this narrow strip of valley would also violate other goals of the Growth Policy to protect and maintain Jefferson County rural character and the community's historic relationship with natural resource development, and to preserve and enhance the rural, friendly, and independent lifestyle currently enjoyed by Jefferson County residents.

BUTTE DISTRICT	
1	DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR
2	DIST. CONST. SUPERV.
3	ASST. DIST. CONST. SUPERV.
4	FIELD PROJ. MGR.
5	ENGR. OFFICER
6	ENGR. SERV. SUPERV.
7	DESIGN
8	LAB
9	TRAFFIC
10	UTILITIES
11	DIST. PERS. ENGR.
12	PERS. SERV. OFF.
13	DIST. PROJ. OFFICER
14	CH. PLD. MANAGER
15	ENGR. SERV. B. BO.
16	PROP. SERV. B. BO.
17	AD. SERV. SUPERV. AT BC
18	MOTOR CARRIER SVCS
19	LAND SURVEYOR
20	DISTRICT FILE

✓ Jim DAVIES
✓ Tom HANSEN
✓ David C. LARSON

We are looking forward to working with you in the future on the project and reviewing all alternatives once you deliver them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerry Keogh".

Gerry Keogh, Chairman
Jefferson County Planning Board

CC: Jim Lynch, Director MDOT
Jefferson County Commission

APPENDIX D

Newspaper Articles Regarding the June 1, 2005 Public Meeting

Highway 69 alternate route faces opposition

■ Proposed safety changes criticized for effect they would have on ranchers

By MARGA LINCOLN
IR staff writer

A Montana Department of Transportation plan to rebuild a scenic but high-accident stretch of Highway 69 south of Boulder is running into mounting opposition from ranchers and rural residents.

MDT will hold a meeting Wednesday, June 1, at 6:30 p.m. in the Jefferson High School cafeteria to present two proposed alternatives for rebuilding the road and to hear public comment.

One proposal would widen the existing road, adding shoulders and straightening some curves between mile post 22 and 31,

according to Jeff Ebert, MDT district engineer for MDT.

The other moves the highway across the Boulder River at the Elkhorn turn-off and runs along what is now Lower Valley Road, a county gravel road.

MDT wants to build on both sides of this highway section because it "in direct effect would bring it up to modern standards so people can travel safer," Ebert said.

It is considering relocating a portion of the roadbed because of adjacent wetlands and rocky cliffs along the current roadway.

Ranchers feel threatened

"People definitely want to improve the safety," said Terry Wenzel, who ranches with her husband, Brad Smith. "They just think this is the wrong way to do it."

More HIGHWAY 69

Highway: Some say safety will be worse

continued from 1A

Relocating the highway is particularly drawing fire.

Minow and about 30 neighbors met in the past few days to discuss the project.

"Everybody opposes the rerouting," said Minow. "Most people want some improvements to the highway, but they're very concerned that the improvements protect their land and rural lifestyle and that it improve safety, not make it worse."

"People are concerned it will increase the amount of high-speed traffic and make it less safe," she said.

"Their proposed change would have a drastic effect on me and other people. My ranching operation will take a pretty big hit," said one neighbor, rancher Ed McCauley. Generations of his family have ranched in that area since the 1860s.

"If they move it over here then I don't have a safe route," he said. "I move cattle and hay and equipment up and down this road all the time."

It would affect six to eight ranching families using the roadway, he said.

People use Lower Valley Road not only for ranch operations, said Minow, but also for scenic drives, school bus routes, horseback riding, biking, jogging and walking. It's where they teach their kids to drive.

Also at issue is the historic "red bridge" that residents have rallied to save in the past along the relocation alternative's route. It's a favorite local swimming hole and fishing spot.

Minow said she thinks the plans threaten the bridge; Ebert said a parallel bridge may be built.

The Elkhorn Working Group went on record with a May 18 letter of opposition to the proposed route change.

The group, which was formed to promote land stewardship and local economies, asks MDT "to abandon further consideration of the proposed alternative of Highway 69."

The proposed change would increase the number of collisions between cars



Highway 69 has little to no shoulder, creating safety hazards. This also makes it difficult for law enforcement officers to pull over speeding vehicles. *IR photo by Marga Lincoln*

and both livestock and wildlife, the letter states, because the Boulder River is a main water source.

The proposal could create other unintended effects, according to the letter.

"If ranches are not economically viable then the trend is to create subdivisions. Subdivisions in turn cause habitat fragmentation and the loss of animal populations," it states,

The project and issues

The total project encompasses about 15 miles, between mile posts 22 and 37.

MDT reports that 106 accidents have been recorded along that stretch of road from Jan. 1, 1994, to Dec. 31, 2003.

Daily traffic volumes are 1,500 to 1,600 per day, with 17 percent of this trucks, according to Ebert.

Accident severity in this section rates 30 percent greater than the statewide average for the state's rural highway system, according to an MDT field report.

And the truck crash severity rate is 70 percent greater than the statewide average for state rural primary highway systems.

MDT faults the outdated and substandard road design for a series of accident clusters.

About seven miles of road would be widening the existing road. The remaining eight miles would be either on the existing roadbed or relocated.

The cost is estimated at \$16 million to \$17 million for either proposal.

Money still has to be allocated for the project, said Ebert. It is at its very beginning stages. The earliest that construction could start would be 2008.

The issue of speed

However, for some, the speed limit presents a bigger safety issue than the road design.

The road's speed limit, set by the Legislature, is 70 mph for cars and 60 for trucks.

However, there is little police enforcement and trucks consistently exceed the posted speed and barrel past vehicles even in non-passing zones, said rancher Randy Kirk.

Enforcement could conceivably improve with the addition of road shoulders, so the highway patrol would have some place to pull over trucks, said Ebert.

Preferred by trucks

Residents would like semis to use Interstate 15, which was built for that

purpose, said Kirk.

MDT can't close Highway 69 to trucks, Ebert said, because it is a primary highway eligible for federal funding. Such highways must be open to trucks.

Highway 69 has become a preferred route for trucks, particularly those heading to Dillon, Idaho, Utah and Las Vegas, said Ebert.

"You don't have to cross the Continental Divide three different times, like you do on the Interstate," he explained. "It's got a flatter grade."

Although there's no permanent weigh station on Highway 69, another reason truckers like it, there is a temporary one that's used on occasion. This would be improved as part of the rebuild project.

Voicing concerns

"We want to get people out," said Ebert. "We're very open to hearing their concerns, comments and questions."

Wednesday's meeting will include a description of the project, a presentation of environmental concerns, and will be open for public comment. Individuals can talk with staff after the meeting about the project's impact on their property.

Neighbors

C-17-01
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CLASSIFIEDS/inside

1000 OFFICE & 1000 TECHNICAL

CHIEF, Administrative Specialist -

CHIEF, Financial Specialist -

CHIEF, Information Specialist -

CHIEF, Legal Specialist -

CHIEF, Operations Specialist -

CHIEF, Planning Specialist -

CHIEF, Research Specialist -

CHIEF, Safety Specialist -

CHIEF, Training Specialist -

CHIEF, Quality Control Specialist -

CHIEF, Human Resources Specialist -

CHIEF, Information Systems Specialist -

CHIEF, Facilities Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Environmental Health Specialist -

CHIEF, Occupational Safety Specialist -

CHIEF, Fire Protection Specialist -

CHIEF, Emergency Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Disaster Preparedness Specialist -

CHIEF, Crisis Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Public Relations Specialist -

CHIEF, Media Relations Specialist -

CHIEF, Community Relations Specialist -

CHIEF, Intergovernmental Relations Specialist -

CHIEF, Legislative Affairs Specialist -

CHIEF, Public Policy Specialist -

CHIEF, Governmental Affairs Specialist -

CHIEF, Policy Analysis Specialist -

CHIEF, Research & Statistics Specialist -

CHIEF, Data Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Information Technology Specialist -

CHIEF, Systems Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Network Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Database Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Software Development Specialist -

CHIEF, Hardware Development Specialist -

CHIEF, IT Support Specialist -

CHIEF, Help Desk Specialist -

CHIEF, Technical Support Specialist -

CHIEF, Training & Development Specialist -

CHIEF, Quality Assurance Specialist -

CHIEF, Project Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Program Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Product Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Marketing Specialist -

CHIEF, Sales Specialist -

CHIEF, Customer Support Specialist -

CHIEF, Business Development Specialist -

CHIEF, Operations Specialist -

CHIEF, Logistics Specialist -

CHIEF, Supply Chain Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Procurement Specialist -

CHIEF, Contract Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Risk Management Specialist -

CHIEF, Compliance Specialist -

CHIEF, Internal Audit Specialist -

CHIEF, External Audit Specialist -

CHIEF, Legal Counsel Specialist -

CHIEF, Regulatory Affairs Specialist -

CHIEF, Public Policy Specialist -

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Hwy. 69 project largely opposed

■ None of the 120 who attend MDT meeting supports plan to relocate the highway

By MAREE LINCOLN
IR Staff Writer

Many Boulder Valley citizens would like to just say no to the state's reconstruction plans for Highway 69 south of Boulder.

They prefer their rural and scenic highway just the way it is, even though it has a high accident rate.

A standing-room-only crowd of about 120 showed

up for a June Montana Department of Transportation public meeting in Boulder to voice their concerns and hear about MDT's proposed plans for safety improvements.

One option would widen the road, add shoulders, and straighten some of the curves between mileposts 22 and 37.

The other alternative moves the highway across the Boulder River at the Elkhorn turn-off and runs it along Lower Valley Road, a county gravel road.

This option is an attempt to address environmental impacts that could arise from widening the existing Highway 69. It runs close to

the Boulder River and is bordered at times by either steep rock cliffs or wetlands.

Both alternatives are meant to address highway safety problems.

Accident severity along this designated stretch of highway is 30 percent greater than the statewide average for the state's rural highway system, according to a recent MDT field report.

No citizens at the meeting favored relocating the highway.

A number of citizens prefer doing nothing with the roadway.

They asked instead for a lower speed limit and

diverting semi-trucks to the nearby Interstate highway.

"People were very passionate about their beliefs and wanting to keep this valley in a rural ranching type of environment," said Jeff Ebert, MDT Butte district engineer.

They'd like it to remain very much like it was 100 years ago when ranchers first settled in the area, he said.

He believes that safety improvements can be made to the road, while still maintaining the rural character of the valley.

"A lot of the testimony focused on things that could be done right away," such as putting in a speed zone and

increasing enforcement, said local resident Terry Minow.

"People were concerned about the speed of the traffic and the amount of truck traffic on Highway 69," she said.

Minow, a member of a newly formed group Boulder Valley Neighbors, said they are developing their own proposed safety alternatives which they'll submit to MDT.

"If you make the road wider and take out the curves, you will actually make it less safe," she said, because there will be more high-speed traffic.

More HIGHWAY, page 2E

Highway: EA should take 12-18 months

continued from 1E

Moving the highway would negatively impact the rural lifestyle of the area, she said.

"Highway 69 is a gorgeous road, especially through the canyon," Minow said. "The trees and foliage in the fall are spectacular. I don't want to see the trees and vegetation stripped out of the area in order to make the road a big wide expanse of pavement."

Former county commissioner Sam Sampson testified that the county, years ago, asked for a lower speed limit, better enforcement of speed limits, and the construction of a permanent weigh station for trucks. None of these requests have been done, he said.

The highway has become a preferred route for trucks heading to Dillon, Idaho and Utah because it has a flatter grade and does not cross the Continental Divide three times, like the Interstate does.

It's widely believed the trucks also use the route to avoid weigh stations.

MDT can't keep trucks off the highway, Ebert said, because it's a state primary highway eligible for federal dollars.

There are also problems with beefing up law enforcement, he said. At this time, the lack of shoulders makes it difficult for officers to pull over speeders.

MDT will continue to accept public comment until July 15 on this stage of the project, said Ebert.

All of the comment becomes part of the public record for the environmental assessment, which should be completed over the next 12 to 18 months.

When a draft of it is available, another public meeting will be held to take additional public comment.

When the draft environmental assessment is released it will recommend one of three things Ebert said:

- A finding that the recommended alternative (whatever it is) will cause no significant environmental impact;

- A recommendation that the preferred alternative requires a full environmental impact statement report; or

- A "no build" recommendation, which leaves the road as it is.

Ebert said he cannot recall any recent studies recommending a "no build" option.